

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK's**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

April, 1985 \$1.75



# 'Untitled'

by Hayford Peirce

AND MORE NEW CRIME  
STORIES BY

Fon Butler  
Rob Kantner  
Hy Conrad  
and others

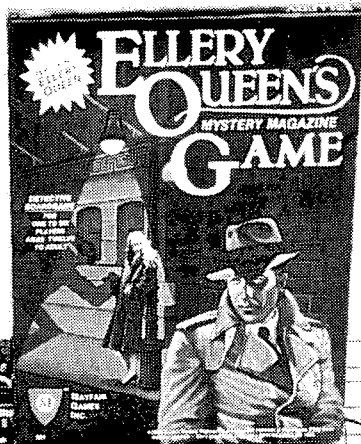


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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**I**t's about this time of year when most of us who live in the northern wilds begin to wonder why; when trips to the Caribbean seem utter necessities; when we adopt attitudes as frosty as the endless slush and sleet outside to our southern-based friends and relatives who call up with cheery remarks about dogwood in bloom and azalea trails and their new spring coats. (*Spring coats?* Our New York dry cleaners doesn't even accept winter clothes for storage until May 1st, and nobody wants to give them up before then anyway.) By the first of March, one even gets a little cross at manuscripts bearing stamps from exotic, *warm* places. Tahiti, for instance.

Not that we get all that much mail from Tahiti, but we get some, thanks to Hayford Peirce, author of our cover story. Peirce is new to mystery writing (though you wouldn't know it from his excellent and suspenseful tale) but has had a number of stories published in

science fiction magazines, *Analog* for the most part, and is the author of two forthcoming sf novels. He moved to Tahiti in 1964, he tells us, where he has "at various times been part-owner of a button factory, a garden center, and a one-hour dry cleaners" (aha! we begin to see a connection!). "Have been married for eleven years to a beautiful French-Russian blonde who shares my interests in French and Chinese cuisines, cooking them as well as eating them, baseball, tennis, mysteries and science fiction," and he is the father of four children. "Am on the threshold of becoming a fulltime writer—if I can find the time to spare from my other activities."

Well, we hope he does—he's a very good writer indeed. And we can even breathe a sigh of relief in the midst of contemplating (or trying not to contemplate) such a paradisaical existence: Mr. Peirce's story is set in Maine, where he was born, and *it's cold in Maine, too.*



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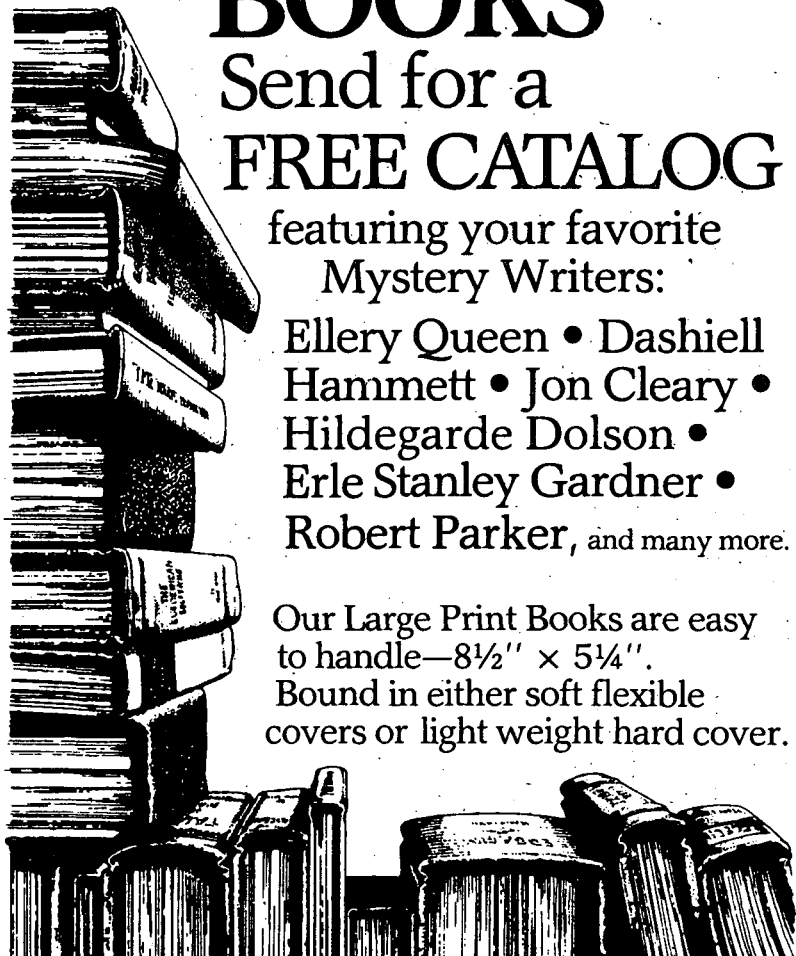
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FICTION

# UNTITLED

by Hayford Peirce



Illustration by Kurt Wallace

There were fifty-three granite steps that wound down from the back yard to the old fashioned wooden gazebo that perched uncertainly above the rushing waters of the Kenduskeag Stream. Canelle Alder had climbed them wearily with Alexandre in her arms perhaps a dozen times since the fine weather had arrived before she realized that she was counting them out loud: "Un, deux, trois . . ."

When she suddenly heard herself she stopped short, while Alexandre squirmed impatiently on her shoulder. Why should I be counting these ridiculous steps? she wondered, and the answer came to her immediately. It was Richard who had told her there were fifty-three steps, the day after they had moved in, and the act of counting them was an affirmation that someday, somehow, Richard would once again lead her down this long shady walk. But as the sharp, familiar pang of grief transfixed her, she knew that Richard—*mon pauvre, pauvre Richard*—would never really be coming back, would never again sit beside her in the warm summer evenings while the waters swirled below, never again—

Tears misted her eyes and she stumbled awkwardly up the remaining steps. "Quar-

*ante-deux, quarante-trois,*" she heard herself chanting, and nearly screamed in despair. Oh God! she wanted to cry; he hasn't even been *gone* for forty-three days!

She had put Alexandre in the shade of the enormous old elm that grew on the very edge of the bank and was shutting the chainlink gate behind her when she heard the phone ringing through the open window of the kitchen. She ran.

"Allo?" she said breathlessly.

"Canelle? Samuel Lynwood here." She had already recognized his excruciating Yankee accent. He was the only person in Bangor, Maine, who seemed to speak French, but he did so as if he were actually mouthing some exotically-written form of American, torturing every letter and every syllable of the lovely French words to conform with the strange, clipped American he had learned at Harvard. His voice now was muted and sober, as it had been for the last six weeks, ever since the afternoon the phone call had said that Richard Alder and his three companions had perished in the crash of his light plane in a thunderstorm in the White Mountains of nearby New Hampshire.

"Something rather bizarre has come up," said Samuel Lynwood in his nasal twang. "I



think you'd best come down to the office. There's a woman who's just left. Dumpy little thing. Says her full name is Elizabeth Piper Alder. Claims to be . . . your husband's wife."

A small hard lump of some nameless apprehension began to pulse within her as the old white-haired man droned on in his meticulous French. She was aware of the words, just as she was of Alexandre tottering about the book-filled office, occasionally sitting down on his diapered behind with a sudden thump, but it was hard to take in their meaning. She shook her head, the glossy black hair glistening in the long, dusty beams of late-afternoon sunshine that slanted across the office, and tried to concentrate.

Samuel Lynwood ran a bony hand through his thick white hair while his lips puckered in sad bewilderment. "A strange lad, Dick. You say you thought he came from some old Maine family, had grown up in these parts?"

She nodded. "That was why I thought it was so odd us getting married like that in Las Vegas. He even *laughed* about it. But . . ." She shrugged dispiritedly. "I thought it was just some strange American custom." How could she have known

otherwise? She was nineteen when she had met Richard in Paris, the spoiled daughter of high-living society parents who had been careless enough to kill themselves in a car wreck, leaving her with neither money nor preparation for the jungle ways of the world. She had struggled for two devastating years before escaping to America with Richard. Her idyll had lasted but two and a half years, tucked away in this small New England town, before it was smashed. And now it seemed as though she might not have even a memory worth cherishing.

Another wife. The words throbbed dully in her brain. *Another wife*. One he'd married in Charleston, South Carolina, seventeen years before. Spent a year with. Deserted. She'd read of his death in a New York paper. Now the bitch wanted to know what she could expect from his estate.

"It's monstrous!" she cried. "I'm his wife!"

Samuel Lynwood nodded gravely. "I'd certainly appreciate it if Dick were here to explain a little. A secretive fella. Just stepped in out of the blue one day about five years ago and bought into my practice. An excellent businessman and excellent lawyer, really tops in corporate structure and tax avoidance. I always wondered

what possessed him to come live in a little backwater like this. But . . . frankly, I needed a partner, and new blood. He certainly brought that . . . and new business." He sighed.

"But what am I to *do*?"

"Do?" Samuel Lynwood leaned across the desk to take her hand. His was warm and dry. "Why, nothing, dear lady. Just let old Sam Lynwood worry about it all. This lady shows us a marriage certificate? Well, we'll just go out and find us a divorce decree someplace. In Las Vegas, perhaps? Maybe *that's* why Dick was laughing when you got married out there. . . ." And he beamed radiantly.

The front doorbell rang just as she was preparing Alexandre for his evening bath. Through the pane of etched glass she saw a tall, angular blonde with closely-cropped hair, green eyes nearly drowned in mascara, a thick sulky mouth.

"Yes?"

"My, you certainly *are* pretty," said the blonde in a soft, rather pleasant voice. "Awfully young, but awfully pretty."

"I don't understand," said Cannelle, scowling, shifting Alexandre irritably in her arms.

"You don't?" The angular woman chuckled. "Well, then. I'm Natalie Jordan." Her mouth

twisted wryly. "I was Mrs. Richard Alder number four. Or was it number five?"

For an hour after the Jordan creature had left, she sat motionless in the faded blue velvet chair in the front parlor, staring out blindly at the oaks and elms that covered the front yard like a canopy. Why couldn't she have neighbors to be friendly with instead of all these gloomy old trees? she wondered. As the trees merged with the night and at last disappeared, she shook herself and walked unsteadily out to the kitchen through the sitting room, then the dining room, then the pantry, then the *telephone* room for heaven's sake!, then at *last* into the kitchen. What was she going to do with this enormous *baraque* of a house on the outskirts of town, two hundred yards from the nearest neighbor?

It wasn't a problem of money, she told herself as she carefully prepared a pot of tea. There was over half a million dollars in insurance to be paid once the insurance ghouls had finished sniffing around. No, it wasn't money. At first she had been haunted by the memory of Richard in every room, in every corner, of this ornate gingerbread monstrosity. It had been

almost too much to bear, the always-present notion that if she came into the breakfast room just one more time, lightly, lightly, sneaking up on him, there he would be, drinking his coffee, reading the Bangor *Daily News*. But of course he never was.

But that was normal, she realized, an ordinary part of grief, something that every widow had to bear, and as the weeks had passed she began to find a dull aching comfort in the feeling that somehow these walls and rooms were imbued with Richard, that he would always be there with them, somehow a part of herself and little Alexandre.

But now! She threw the sugar cubes into the cup with sudden rage, splashing hot tea across the table. *Now* she wondered if she wanted to live here any more. Or even live at all. Oh Richard, she waived silently, *how could you?*

"Your daughter? Or, your son," the Jordan creature had said after perching on the edge of the dark maroon sofa in the parlor. "Hmmpf. That's the first one I know of. At least the bastard didn't believe in leaving a lot of brats all over the place. Oh, *please* excuse me! Your daughter is just *divine*."

Canelle felt the tips of her fingernails cutting into her

palms. She drew a deep breath. "You pretend you were . . . were married to Monsieur Alder?"

The angular blonde laughed hatefully. "Pretend? Honey, I *was* married to that bastard. For three years and two months. From 1971 to 1974. I divorced him in Albany, New York, for uncontested adultery. He's been paying me alimony ever since." She seemed to see Canelle shrink in against herself. "You didn't know? Ha! That's typical, that's typical!"

"But—" Canelle reached out, almost imploringly. Before she could snatch her hand back the insane creature had jumped up to grab it in her long bony fingers. "So!" she said harshly, releasing Canelle's hand. "You're not *wearing* it at any rate." She stepped back to glare down unblinkingly from her great height. "You *do* have it, though, don't you? I can feel it, somewhere near, I can feel it calling me. . . ."

Canelle babbled her dismay. "What, what . . ."

"The ring," she hissed. "The three-carat diamond ring in the old fashioned setting with 'Amelia Wheelwright' engraved inside. You've got it, I know it!"

"Oh God," she whispered, "that's the ring—"

"—he stole from me the last time I ever saw him. It was my

great-grandmother's ring, it was in the family for over a hundred years, my grandma gave it to me just before she died, it—"

What was left of her life's foundations seemed to be crumbling beneath her. "He . . . he told me it was *his* grandmother's. . . ."

Again that awful laugh. She fled, heedless of Alexandre, up the front stairs to her bedroom, and the little wall safe behind the painting. In what seemed like instants she had somehow floated back down the stairs and was pressing the hateful object into the palm of the gloating blonde. "Take it," she cried, "I don't want to ever see it again, just take it and get out of here!"

"Well, that's certainly awfully kind of you," purred the ghastly *salope*, clutching the ring greedily to her scrawny breast. "You're really awfully sweet, you know that? And awfully fair, I can tell that, too. I just know we're going to work out a fair deal about my alimony. . . ."

**T**hat was how the nightmare had begun.

Samuel Lynwood had actually laughed. "She wants *you* to continue paying *his* alimony? That's insane!"

"She is insane, I tell you! If you'd seen her eyes, the way she

looked at me . . ." Canelle shuddered. "I really think she's insane."

"I believe you, I really do. But that's what we shysters are for, isn't it? Just to take care of situations like this."

But that was before the names of three more former wives had turned up in the course of the next six weeks.

Canelle made a little list of them and stared at the names in fascination: Diana Ewell, Gene Staab, Anna Bennett. One lived in Bismarck, North Dakota, one in Orlando, Florida, the other in Madison, Wisconsin. All of them were curious as to the disposition of the estate of the late Richard Alder.

"This is ridiculous," grumbled Samuel Lynwood. "There's one thing I've hesitated to do, out of concern for your feelings, your . . . sentiment for—"

"—for Richard? Sentiment?" she cried. "I'll tell you my sentiments for him! I hate him! I hate him! *I hate him!*"

Old Samuel Lynwood limped around the desk to comfort her. "Understandable," he murmured, "this is a trying situation. Then you don't have any objection if I ask my friend Owen French, that's *Chief* French, to see what . . . information the police might—"

"No," she muttered, while

the tears fell unheeded from her eyes. "I don't have any objections."

After that the insurance jackals had returned. A man with *six* wives? One of them claiming she'd never been properly divorced? An airplane accident? Five hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars in claims waiting to be paid? A lovely little mess. *Most* irregular. Just the thing to be lengthily investigated. While the insurance remained unpaid, steadily earning interest for the company. Yes, the insurance company *loved* it!

And even with the house now, and the rest of the estate, the spectre of problems began to loom.

"Could be tricky," admitted Samuel Lynwood reluctantly, "especially with that wretched wife number whatever she is, Elizabeth Piper Alder, the one who claims to be the sole true heir." He made an awful pretense of smiling. "I've got a fella going through the Mexican divorce records. I'll bet you anything we hit paydirt there. He may have had his faults, young Dick, but I tell you he wasn't a bigamist!"

The first phone call had come that same evening, as she lay in bed trying to concentrate on

something ridiculous on television. It was Natalie Jordan, the demented blonde harpy who had stared at her with such terrifying intensity. She sounded drugged, or drunk, or just crazy. "You're rich," she said in her soft, insidious voice. "You're rich rich rich and I'm poor poor poor and what are you going to do about it? He wouldn't be dead, you know, if it weren't for you. That's what they told me: he was flying home to his little lovey-dovey, wasn't he, right in the middle of that great big storm? And now he's dead because of you, and Natalie doesn't have her nice alimony check every month, and so it's you that's going to have to pay it, isn't it?"

For a long moment Canelle was silent, stunned by the same overpowering feeling of terrible guilt that had crushed her in the days that followed the accident.

She knew only too well that Richard had loudly insisted on lifting off in the face of warnings from the Burlington airport and against the will of his traveling companions—to ensure he'd be home that night with his beloved Canelle and Alexandre. But all that wasted grief was behind her now, didn't this madwoman realize?

The very thought of Richard suddenly enraged her. *He* was



responsible for this madwoman harassing her! "You idiot!" she screamed into the phone, "I'll never pay you a *cent*! I'll see that you're locked up in the . . . in the place for *crazy* people!"

She clearly heard Natalie Jordan catch her breath. "You . . . you wouldn't!" she breathed—fearfully?

Yes! She was afraid! "I'll lock you up, you madwoman! I'll make them put you in a jail, I'll—"

There was a gasp, and the phone clicked. Canelle sagged back against the pillows. Her heart was pounding against her breast and she felt giddy with triumph. *That* one would never bother her again!

Three days later she made the long walk through the shady front yard to the mailbox by the gate, with Alexandre toddling uncertainly behind her. Her fingers reached in for the mound of junk mail that arrived day after day and encountered a peculiar-feeling object. She stared at it quizzically. It was a small plastic doll with movable arms and legs. It was a baby boy, naked. Why, she wondered, what . . .

That was until she saw the brown twine knotted around the neck. Knotted carefully in a hangman's noose.

The following day she marched to the mailbox as if to her execution.

You must, she told herself. You can't let yourself be frightened by a crazy woman. She opened the little door and peeked inside cautiously. With enormous relief she saw there was nothing but envelopes and magazines. It was only when she reached in to pull them out that her hand encountered something warm and wet and yielding. She snatched her hand back and when she saw the red on her fingers began to scream . . .

"A piece of liver," said Samuel Lynwood distastefully, "with a little plastic knife stuck in it." He shook his head. "How disgusting! How . . ." He sighed and made little brushing motions with his fingers, as if to shake blood from the tips of his fingers. They stood in the shade of an oak tree by the side of the road and watched the black and white squad car drive away with its grisly little package. Evidence—of what?

"Come in and let me give you a cup of tea," Canelle suggested.

"A cup of *whisky*," corrected Samuel Lynwood firmly in his marvelously bizarre French. In spite of herself she felt a smile tug feebly at her lips.

They drank their tea and whisky at the Formica table in the small breakfast room. "Suppose," said Canelle tentatively: "just suppose that something . . . happened to me."

"Nonsense!" boomed Samuel Lynwood, spluttering whisky down his vest. "Nothing's going—"

"I know. Nothing will happen. But suppose it did? What would happen to my baby? To Alexandre? *I* don't have any family. Richard doesn't either—except for all those awful, well, you know."

Samuel Lynwood pursed his lips. "Hmmp. I honestly don't know. I recall Dick saying something a year or so ago about him drawing up wills for both of you. I know what Dick's is, naturally, since I'm the executor. But yours, now? Don't think I ever saw it. You don't remember what's in it? There's probably a copy at—"

"I have one here, it's up in the safe."

Samuel Lynwood leafed through it slowly, his lips occasionally pushing in and out. "... if I and my beloved wife Canelle should perish in a common disaster, leaving issue, then I . . . blah blah blah, my goodness, how we lawyers go on." He dropped the will on the table and looked up. "Well, it's clear enough. You have to recall that

this will was drawn up before Alexandre was born, so it's rather vague on that score. Basically it says that Richard is to act as executor of your estate, and if he predeceases you Samuel Lynwood shall. If both of you perish in a common disaster, leaving issue—that's Alexandre—then Samuel Lynwood is to act as guardian and trustee of the issue until the age of twenty-one." He puffed his cheeks out with a sigh. "My goodness. You think he might have asked me first! Not that I'm not flattered, but—"

"You mean you *wouldn't*? But who else is there?"

"Hmmp. Well. I'm an old man, but, well . . ."

Canelle broke into a radiant smile. "*I knew* you would!"

**S**amuel Lynwood called the next morning. "Owen—that's Chief French—has been doing some checking. That Jordan woman seems to be checked into a motel in Brewer, just across the river. As bold as brass, apparently. He's asked the Brewer police to keep an eye on her. And he'll be keeping an eye on your house, too. It's too bad you're so screened off from your neighbors, it makes it easy for—well!"

"But they can't guard me all the time," protested Canelle.

"Hmmp. Tell you what. Why don't we get you a dog? I know a fella has a kennel out to Green Lake. Raises Dobermans. Why don't you and Alexandre just get in that car of yours and drive by and pick me up at three o'clock and we'll go take a look."

The dog was wiry and black with long, thin teeth and was absolutely terrifying. But Alexandre loved him and Mr. Burgess the kennelman assured her that he was gentle and loving with children. She doubted it. But reluctantly she let him be put in the car, and as she drove back through the stifling heat of the late afternoon—with the great beast drooling on the seat behind her—she began to feel a sense of relief, and even of defiance. All right, crazy woman, she thought, now let's see you come sneaking around our property.

The phone rang a week later. The voice of the crazy woman was nearly incomprehensible with hysteria. "I came by to see you, you bitch, as a friend, as a *friend*! You hear? Your dog *bit* me, he bit me in the arm! I'm bleeding. Did you know? I'm *bleeding*. There's blood on me, there's blood all *over* me! I was leaving, I was going back to New York, I just wanted to say goodbye to you and your dog

wouldn't let me, he bit me instead." Transfixed, unable to breathe, Canelle heard what seemed to be low sobs. Then heavy breathing. "I was going to leave"—the voice hardly more than a whisper. "But now I'm going to kill you!"—a scream.

Owen French himself drove across the Penobscot, Samuel Lynwood told her, to reason in his own way with the crazy woman. Strictly illegally, since Brewer was beyond his jurisdiction, but it was unlikely that a hick from the big city would realize that. "He threw a pretty good scare into her, I'd say. The chief's pretty impressive when he's angry." Canelle believed him. Owen French was enormously fat, with a broad red face and mean little pale blue eyes and almost no eyebrows at all. She almost sympathized with the crazy woman. "He said she was weeping and moaning when he left." Samuel Lynwood looked down at his fingernails. "Don't like to hassle a woman, of course, but, well, dammit all . . ." For once he was at a loss for words.

Canelle nodded somberly. She *was* sorry for the crazy woman. But—even if she was crazy, she had to be made to leave her alone, didn't she? And her baby.

Her baby disappeared that

Saturday afternoon while they were in the big A&P on State Street and Broadway. Alexandre loved to ride in the shopping cart, securely perched in the little seat that unfolded, as they roved up and down the aisles. They were in front of the dairy department and. Alexandre was examining a large ripe orange Canelle had given him when she remembered she hadn't gotten the lettuce from the produce stand. All the way back 'across the store! Damn! "Stay right here, honey," she admonished playfully, chucking him under the chin. "Don't go running around."

When she returned Alexandre was gone. At first she thought she had mistaken the cart. But there were the carrots, the cheese, the sausage, the—

She began to run frantically up and down the aisles, shouting his name. There were dozens of people at the checkout counters. She pushed her way through them, her eyes wild with surmise. "Alexandre!" she cried, "Alexandre!"

A kind policeman eventually escorted her from the manager's office to her car in the parking lot. "Now don't you worry none, miss," he said in his strange downeast American, "we'll find that baby before—" He stopped short and

gave Canelle a peculiar look. "In your car there—who's *that*?"

"*Mon dieu!*" She tugged the door open. Alexandre was sprawled on the front seat, still playing with his orange.

"Geez, lady," the policeman began reproachfully as she clutched her baby to her neck. Until he saw the piece of white clothesline that dangled from around the boy's neck, the hangman's noose sloppily but effectively tied.

"**I**'ll leave!" she cried wildly, "for anywhere! I can't live here any longer. Sell the house, give me the money, I'll—"

Samuel Lynwood shook his head dolefully. "Awfully difficult to do, Canelle, believe me. This whole probate's a terrible mess. Old Judge Bickford isn't being helpful about it at all. At least Dick doesn't seem to have a police record anywhere. Just this . . . strange penchant for—" He sighed. "If we don't turn up something in the Dominican Republic about that divorce . . ." He grimaced.

Canelle could feel the despair closing in around her. "The insurance, what about the insurance? When—"

"Good idea. I'll send them a *really* stiff letter this time."

She nodded helplessly. What remained of her life was col-

lapsing around her. If it weren't for Alexandre— "That woman, she's really gone? She's not in Maine any more?"

"That's what Owen says. She disappeared about the same time as . . . what happened at the A&P. If she's still in Maine, he can't locate her. And it's been almost a month now. I really think, Canelle, that this situation is all over."

"Maybe," she said sullenly. "But I know she'll be back."

"Hm. Maybe you'd feel better if you had a gun. Oh, just a little one," he added hastily. "Just to carry in your purse when you go out. That dog of yours, he's certainly all the protection you need at home. My word! He *is* a watchdog!"

Chief French helped her pick out a gun, a small black .25 caliber automatic that didn't look dangerous at all. Samuel Lynwood lived with his wife in an enormous old farmhouse on a hill a few miles north of the city on the road to Orono. It badly needed a coat of paint but had a beautiful view of the Penobscot River below, and a warm friendly feeling that came from the unseen presence of a hundred years of Lynwoods. His wife Peggy was a total surprise, a tremendously chic little blonde who seemed to maintain an ageless late thirties. There

were woods and fields behind the house and Canelle practiced there grimly with the tiny gun until her ears rang and her hand and arm were sore. After that she carried it tucked away in her purse and swore to herself that if anybody so much as *breathed* on Alexandre—

In early November there was exciting news from Samuel Lynwood. A divorce had been granted Mrs. Elizabeth Piper Alder in the Dominican Republic on December 13th, 1968. "Perfectly valid here in the States. She's the one who went down there and got it, so she hasn't got any comeback at all." He chuckled. "Those Dominican divorces can be tricky. I think this calls for a modest celebration, don't you, Mrs. Alder?"

Later that month she went to his house for Thanksgiving dinner, even though she hated cranberries and pumpkin pie and baked squash and creamed onions and oyster stuffing and all those other peculiar foods which were so nasty that even Americans could only tolerate them once a year. All of their grownup children and their wives were there, and she enjoyed herself, and at least the turkey, and got a little tipsy on red California wine.

As she let herself into the house early that evening with



Alexandre sleeping in her arms the phone was ringing. "My check hasn't arrived!" the familiar voice yelled stridently. "When is my *check* going to arrive?"

Despair and anger clutched at her throat, then miraculously lifted as an end to all her problems suddenly came to her, startling in its clarity. She felt a wild elation: she would *kill* her! Why hadn't she thought of it before? "Where are you?" she whispered craftily, "where—" But she was speaking to the dial tone.

The first snow of the year fell a few days after Thanksgiving, a light dusting of white that melted as soon as the afternoon sun found it. Alexandre, who would soon be two, was fascinated by it. Noirot, the Doberman, was more suspicious. He sniffed it distastefully and walked across it skittishly, like a kitten through a mud puddle. Canelle snorted to herself. "I thought you Dobermans were supposed to be tough."

But when she and Alexandre returned late the next afternoon from a drive down the coast to Camden and a lobster luncheon, the dog was gone. It would have been easy enough for it to jump over the low chainlink fence that ran around the back and sides of the prop-

erty, or over the white picket fence that ran along the road. *Merde*, she said to herself after she had prowled the neighborhood fruitlessly for three-quarters of an hour: he must be *en chaleur*.

It wasn't until she had shut the front door behind her and stepped into the vast, dark house that another possibility occurred to her. When it did, the fear leaped to her throat. The gun clutched in her hand, the safety off, she ran through the house, flipping on lights, opening the closets, peering under the beds, venturing with trepidation into the hot musty attic and the damp smelly basement. But everything was in order. She collapsed into a chair in the parlor, the gun dangling from a listless hand. Her legs were trembling. She began to cry soundlessly.

**I**t seemed cold enough for snow, but instead an icy rain began to fall. It started on Wednesday as a mild drizzle and by that afternoon had become a steady downpour that lasted throughout the night. In the morning it halted momentarily, then renewed itself with even greater force, pounding against the windows and rattling the shutters. At noon its intensity increased again, hammering down with

a steady roar like a mighty waterfall. Gusts of wind had begun, too, ripping branches from the leafless trees and slamming the rain against the house in sporadic fury. Canelle sipped hot tea and cuddled deep into an easy chair in the upstairs reading room, while Alexandre pushed toy cars about on the floor, and tried to tell herself there was nothing more cheery than being snug and warm in a solid house while outside the elements raged angrily.

It was dark by four in the afternoon and Canelle moved through the house; turning on the few lights that hadn't been burning since morning. "Come to *maman*," she called to Alexandre. "Let's have our little din-din." The tomato soup was heating on the stove and a loaf of so-called French bread was heating in the oven when the lights flickered, dimmed, flared, and disappeared. She was in utter darkness. From his high-chair Alexandre began to wail.

She held the panic down. It wasn't pitch dark after all, the gas light on the stove cast a dim blue light under the saucepan. She turned on the other three burners and by their meager light began to search for candles. Outside the wind rose to a howl. "We'll be like brave pioneer women," she told Alexandre, "snug and safe in our

little log cabin with just our little candles." But that conjured up red Indians lurking in the dark forests just outside, knives and tomahawks in their hands, murder in their hearts. . . . She grabbed Alexandre and blundered through the darkened house up to the nursery.

By eight o'clock the electricity was still out and the rain's fury was unremitting. The wind was screeching, and she could feel the house itself shuddering to the gusts. By the yellow light of a small candle she watched Alexandre asleep in his crib, his kangaroo clutched tightly to him. Perhaps she should go down to the kitchen to—

There was a terrible ripping noise followed by strange scrabbling sounds against the side of the house. Canelle jumped to her feet. A moment later the floor vibrated beneath her feet and there came a tremendous thump that seemed to shake her physically. Her heart began to pound. Oh God, she thought, one of the trees . . . She stepped out into the darkened corridor, the candle in her hand, and groped her way down to the bedroom. Outside it was impossible to distinguish anything in the inky blackness.

As she returned to the nursery something exploded in the window before her with a sharp crash that was almost instantly

drowned out by the keening of the wind. Just before her candle guttered and flickered out, she saw that a rock the size of her fist lay on the floor.

Hardly thinking, she stumbled into the nursery, grabbed Alexandre roughly from his crib, and blindly made her way down the hall to her bedroom. She laid Alexandre on the bed and desperately groped on the night table for the telephone. At last she raised it to her ear. There was no tone at all—it was dead.

You mustn't panic, she told herself, you mustn't panic. The car, we've got to get down to the car. Acting before she could be paralyzed by fear, she snuggled Alexandre into her arms and felt her way through the darkness to the back staircase. The thought of someone waiting for her there in the darkness was almost more than she could bear. She reached the bottom and shuffled past the playroom until she encountered a wall. There! The door to the garage was on the left!

She turned the key in the lock, pushed the door open, and all in a single rush ran blindly to her car. Gasping now, she pulled the door open, thrust in Alexandre, and seated herself behind the wheel. The overhead dome light gave her merciful illumination. The keys were where she had left them,

in the ignition. She checked to make certain the transmission was in park, turned the key, and waited for the roar of the engine. Nothing happened. Frantically she twisted the key. A total deadness. Maybe it was the battery. She flicked the switch for the headlights. They came on at once, illuminating the entire garage and casting weird black shadows. She wanted to scream, to pound her fists on someone, something. She turned the key again. Still nothing. She could feel the panic about to seize her.

With the headlights on she suddenly noticed what the darkness had hidden: the side door to the garage was open. *The door was open!* She stared horror-stricken, unable to move. Rain was pouring in through the opening and beyond the door was a terrible blackness. But now the rain seemed to stop. And . . . and was that a movement at the door? Oh God oh God. She squeezed Alexandre to her, unaware of the low keening noise that escaped her lips, and helplessly, hopelessly, watched a vast yellow figure step slowly out of the darkness and into the light. She could feel the primal scream of terror about to burst from her lungs when—

"Oh God," she sobbed, "it's you!"

Scrambling from the car she threw herself into the arms of Samuel Lynwood.

"Thought I'd best come down to see if you were all right," he said when he had gently disengaged her. "That's quite a storm we're having."

"Thank God you did," she gasped. "There's someone . . . someone threw a rock, it frightened me, I—"

"A rock?" he said sharply. "At you? There's a tree down, you know, against the back of the house. I . . . I thought I saw some movement there, but in this cursed weather . . ." He shook the water impatiently from his matted white hair. "I was upstairs," gasped Canelle. "She threw a rock through the window."

"She? Who do you . . . oh. That crazy woman. You saw her?"

"Yes! No! Oh, Samuel, I don't know! I'm scared."

"Well, I don't blame you at all, my dear. Why don't you just get Alexandre and we'll go back in the house for a minute and collect our wits."

In the kitchen she lighted candles and put on a saucepan of milk to warm. With Samuel Lynwood here in the house there really was a warm, cosy feeling in being sheltered from the storm. She rocked back and forth gently, Alexandre still

sleeping soundly in her arms. Samuel Lynwood had removed his rain slicker and was fingering his chin thoughtfully.

"Don't I recall you shooting off a little gun up at my place?"

"Oh God! I feel so stupid! I completely forgot about the gun. I could have—it's right behind you, in my purse there."

"Ah yes, here it is. Loaded, I take it? Just let me check. Yes, ready to go."

"You're . . . you're going to go look for that woman?" The apprehension was returning now.

"Not really," he said softly without looking up. "Why . . . why don't you put Alexandre down someplace, and then we'll . . . go elsewhere and do what has to be done."

"Done?" she echoed, watching incredulously as the little black gun came up to point squarely at her stomach. "You're . . . you're joking!"

"Afraid not," he said sadly. "I hate to do this, but . . ." He shrugged apologetically. "That Peggy's an awfully expensive woman to keep. . . ."

As if from a vast distance she felt her mouth working, heard words nearly lost against the rumble of the storm. "You're going to *kill* my baby and . . . and *me*?"

"Kill your baby? Good heavens!" His eyes widened. "Of

course not. He's the whole point of this, don't ye see? The insurance company paid off your claim yesterday, it's already deposited in your account, the whole five hundred and sixty-five thousand. And with the so-called first Mrs. Alder out of the way, the probate will be a snap. After that . . ." He grimaced. "An unfortunate accident in the dark, just before I got here . . . well, I'll be trustee and guardian of this little lad here until he's twenty-one. There'll be a fair amount of money to handle, a fair amount . . ."

She stared at him in horror. "You're the one who . . . put that liver—"

"No, no," he said hastily, "not at all. That was that crazy woman, I suppose. I, well, I saw you quite by chance that day in the A&P and the whole idea suddenly came to me. I—"

"You kidnapped my baby!" she screamed, suddenly throwing off the strange inertia that had paralyzed her. "You tied a rope around his neck! You—" She took a purposeful step forward and Samuel Lynwood retreated nervously. "You—!" She felt a rage so overpowering, a hatred so concentrated that it was more than she could contain. This was Richard's fault, she suddenly realized, Richard's and the baby's, too! The

figure of Samuel Lynwood suddenly blurred before her as the burning hatred bubbled over like lava from a volcano. "I'll kill you!" she cried harshly. "I'll kill you!"

And threw her baby with all her force against his gaping face. Too late, he threw up his arms, over-balanced, tottered weakly for a moment, then fell heavily backwards. His head crashed against the top of the stove and knocked over the saucepan of boiling milk. As he slumped to the floor the milk gushed over his exposed face. He began to scream.

She darted forward to snatch up the wailing baby, then backed across the room. The little gun was at her feet. She picked it up and pointed it uncertainly at Samuel Lynwood. He was still screaming when he suddenly clutched his chest. His body arched once, twice, like a great fish in agony, and then collapsed upon itself. He lay still on the kitchen floor, his face mercifully turned from her view. She shuffled forward warily, alert for any trick. Alexandre was still wailing deafeningly into her ear. "You frightened my baby," she said to the body on the floor as if in explanation, and kicked it with all her force in the lifeless stomach.



FICTION



# The Crown Jewel

by Hy Conrad

Illustration by George Thompson

“Small affairs are so much nicer than big ones, don't you think?”

You've got to be careful with clients. If you're lucky and help them out, odds are a few are going to be grateful enough to think of you as a friend. You don't always want that.

“They give you a chance to practice the art of conversation.”

Sure, if the ex-client owns a ball club, and throws a season box your way, that's fine. But when the ex-client turns out to be a talkative widow who insists you show up at the most boring dinner party since some caveman chiseled the first place setting . . .

“Stewart Cavanaugh. Say something, dear. I don't think I've heard four words from you all evening.”

“I prefer to listen.”

I really preferred to sleep, but you can't say that. This was Ilsa Crown's coming home bash from her around-the-world cruise, and I guess yours truly had to show. After all, I was the one who suggested the trip.

I'd met Ilsa in that very room only eight months earlier. Her husband had just been wheeled away on a coroner's gurney. The police were saying suicide and Ilsa was saying murder in her usual strident tones. Her

son, Marvin Crown, had brought me in to cast the deciding vote.

I shouldn't bad-mouth Ilsa. She'd had it pretty hard, and it was good seeing her tanned and recovered. A smile once more played on her lips, an extra ten pounds spread themselves over her ample frame, and a strawberry sheen transformed her naturally auburn locks to a color I doubt has ever occurred in nature.

There were five of us at her Westchester estate on that warm winter evening, all sitting at the long mahogany table and fussing over dessert. An attractive fashion designer had been invited as my companion, but she'd been called away to a funeral in Buffalo. Some people get all the luck.

I had the west side of the mahogany to myself. Marvin was to the south, his eyes riveted on the person directly to his mother's left. The seat beside him was occupied by Marilyn, the only other Crown child. She wasn't as obvious as Marvin, but her eyes also gravitated to the northeast.

I couldn't blame them. You send your mater off on a cruise and you expect her to come back with a few souvenirs, but nothing over six feet and breathing.

Its name was Julian Sieberg. He was about my size but five years younger and twenty

pounds lighter. He had hanger shoulders, the bony kind that let a jacket fall just right; his features, like his clothes, were just a little too perfect; his dimple was just a little too pronounced; his age was just a little under thirty. The only thing he and Ilsa seemed to have in common was a penchant for artificially colored hair. His was a little too blond.

"Don't stare, you'll make him self-conscious." Ilsa pressed her meaty hand into Julian's, displacing his dessert fork. He squeezed it affectionately, then returned to his cutlery and his raspberry trifle.

"Isn't he a dream? We met first night out. He was alone and so embarrassed, the poor thing, in black tie. It was his maiden cruise, and of course he had no idea you don't dress first night out. I had the steward switch me to his table."

"Your mother's a very sympathetic woman." Julian smiled.

"And that's when we discovered our common mania for bridge. Every afternoon—"

And so it went, me staring at the children staring at Julian, and all four of us listening to Ilsa's gushing.

Ilsa represented the North Star of the dinner table, quite literally. The Polaris Diamond is one of those fabled gems. Like the Hope Diamond and the Star

of India, the Polaris is as valued for its romantic history as for its hundred-plus carats. Henry Crown, Ilsa's late mate, had purchased the sparkler twenty years before from the estate of a White Russian who had pried it from the neck of the Tsarina Alexandra, probably when her attention was focused on more important things like the collapse of an empire.

Right now it was shimmering in a platinum-encrusted setting attached to a diamond-studded chain. And the whole shebang was bobbing up and down on Ilsa's substantial bosom. The light from the chandelier reflected off the stone, punctuating her enthusiastic description of a grand slam, bid and made.

"And of course my heart nearly stopped when Julian bid a new suit at the four level. What is he trying to tell me? We'd already settled on hearts, at least I thought we had—"

"Why are you wearing the Polaris?"

"Excuse me, Marvin?"

"The Polaris. When Dad insured it, it was on the condition that you keep it in the vault or take precautions."

"I'm wearing it in my own home." Ilsa's voice adopted a frosty edge. "To me that seems an appropriate precaution. Besides, we have in attendance New York's premiere detec-

tive." Her green eyes twinkled in my direction. "Are you armed, Stewart?"

I held up my coffee spoon and got an appreciative laugh from north and northeast.

Julian cut short his chuckle. "It's my fault, really. Somewhere between hands your mother happened to mention the Polaris. Ignorant fool that I am, I'd never even heard of it. Ilsa promised she'd wear it for me once we got home."

"Home?" Marilyn pounced on the word. "What do you mean by home?"

"Home. The United States." He was trying to be pleasant, but no one was making it easy. "Really, Marilyn, I have a house of my own and an independent income. I'm not about to impose on anyone."

"Children, please. What Julian and I do with our lives is our business."

Ilsa paused just long enough to let Marvin screw up his courage, cough into his fist, and blurt out what everyone had been trying to avoid.

"We're just concerned, Mother, that's all. You happen to be a wealthy woman. You've just gone through a traumatic period, and—"

"Marvin, dear. I'm certainly old enough to know what I'm doing."

I've yet to understand what

a person's age has to do with knowing anything. And as if to prove my point, Ilsa threw her hefty arms behind her neck, unclasped the Polaris, and handed it to me.

"There you are." She purred the words through an acerbic smile. "Does that make you feel better? Your father's priceless diamond is in the hands of a burly detective."

"I'd hardly call myself burly."

"I'm sorry, Stewart, I'm upset. Besides, the words burly and detective seem to go together."

"Well-built, perhaps; but not burly."

"Mother, this is ridiculous. I just meant that you should be careful about men."

I can't vouch for the next few statements. My attention had shifted. I've never been wild about possessions, but holding the Polaris for those few seconds, I could feel what it's like to be obsessed with an object. It was surprisingly cool to the touch. And the light didn't just bounce off the large surfaces but seemed to be absorbed into the core and then to burst out again in all directions. Like the peddler in the Aladdin story who traded new lamps for old, it took in the mundane glow of a crystal chandelier and generously gave back a new breed of light, an indescribable—

A soft, throaty laugh poured from Julian's lips, just loud enough to interrupt everything.

"Is it really so awe-inspiring, Stew, or are you just being polite?"

"Was my jaw hanging open? I've really never seen anything like it."

"When Henry first gave it to me—" Ilsa smiled and you could see a young girl somewhere in her eyes. "It was our fifth anniversary. Poor Henry. I would sit with it for hours on end. Does it still have that glow?"

"It's certainly got something."

"Funny how we change and it doesn't. I guess that's part of its appeal."

"You should let the rest of us take a look." Julian's suggestion was a bit self-conscious, as if his simple desire to inspect the diamond would make him too much like a gigolo.

"Can we do that, Mother, please?" He'd found a temporary ally in Marilyn. "I've never seen it close up. I remember when you used to wear it to parties and you'd come and kiss me good night. I'd try to look at it when you leaned over, but it was always swinging too much."

"More interested in my jewelry than my kisses." It was hard to tell if Ilsa was teasing her daughter or not. "Very well.

Stewart, pass it around the table."

I handed the sparkling constellation to Marvin. He was less than happy with this little ceremony and held onto it just long enough to be polite. Marvin was in his early twenties, small-boned and light complexioned. I could imagine the massive Henry Crown's being disappointed in him from birth. He spent his weekdays in a Wall Street bank, one of those behind-the-sceners who can't explain what they actually do to make their money but still make a lot of it.

"Very nice," he said after a cursory inspection. "The diamond market is doing well, especially the investment-quality pieces."

"That's all you see, isn't it." Ilsa spoke with resigned humor. "Where did you inherit this trait, dear? I think you were left on my doorstep by a band of gypsy bankers."

"That's not fair. I appreciate beauty as much as the next man." Marvin avoided his mother's gaze and sullenly passed the investment-quality piece to his sister.

Marilyn immediately held the diamond to the base of her neck, closed her eyes, and reveled in its cool, hard touch.

"How do I look?" Her eyes opened—green—and she

looked straight into mine.

She was different from her brother altogether; in a way, I suppose, a nineteen-year-old version of her mother, which might explain why they didn't get along. She was attractive enough, slender and delicately featured, with a youthful version of Ilsa's auburn hair. Everything a man could want, and less.

Marilyn had just given a better description of herself than I could ever come up with. A pre-Copernicus mentality, that's what I call it. She was at the hub of the universe and diamonds, like men, were of no use unless they complimented her.

"You look terrific," I responded dutifully.

Marilyn smiled and Ilsa glared. Too much alike.

Julian's well-manicured hands were the next to hold the Polaris. It shimmered gently as he inspected every detail. "Almost perfect," he announced.

"What do you mean by that?" Ilsa tried to make it nonchalant. "What's wrong? Tell me. Is there a flaw?"

"I'm afraid so." Julian rose from the table and slowly circled behind the apprehensive hostess. Then, holding up the necklace with a dramatic flair, he draped it around her neck and centered the paperweight-sized stone.

"Now it's perfect." He fastened the clasp, placed his hands lightly on her shoulders, and whispered a kiss on the nape of her neck. Sappy, yes, but perhaps the most seductive thing I've ever seen in a dining room.

The children were shocked into a stony silence. I don't know what I would have done either if a stranger had suddenly walked up to my mother and kissed any part of her except the hand.

Ilsa herself reacted with a flood of emotion. Her shoulders trembled. A blush became visible, starting at her décolletage and rising slow and pink to her hairline. A girlish giggle died almost as soon as it began, and her right hand floated to the spot where his lips touched.

Julian crossed quickly back to his own chair. "I apologize, Ilsa. I wasn't thinking."

"No, it's all right. You just took me by surprise." Her words were slow and her voice distant. "I didn't realize until this very minute—"

"Mother?" The word was a little louder than necessary in the intimate setting.

"It's been so terribly long. I'm all right, Marvin, dear." A sad smile. "I'm afraid even with your father, after the first few years—" Silence followed. Her eyes focused on a spot of dust and her head tilted slightly to

the right. I recognized the symptoms.

"Ilsa, for a woman who believes in the art of conversation, you're certainly stopping it cold." I'd seen her like this once before, and the result had been disastrous. Ilsa Crown was getting an idea.

"I'm perfectly fine, Stewart. Just thinking."

My heart fell about two feet.

"Stewart, dear, would you do me a favor?"

No, absolutely not, under no circumstances. "Depends on what it is."

"Would you unclasp the Polaris? I want you to return it to the vault."

I have to admit, that threw me off guard. It sounded like a reasonable request.

"Thank you," Ilsa said when I completed the first part of the favor. "Now I want all of you to come with us. The vault is in Henry's wing."

A sure barometer of how well a rich couple gets along is the distance between their pillows. Poor people are forced to nap in the same bed, middle class people in the same room, but your millionaires can put as much distance between themselves as they like. It was a statement of the late Henry's devotion that a dozen years ago he had a separate wing built a good nautical mile from Ilsa's.

Of course no one knew what she was up to. Marvin and Marilyn hiked along together murmuring to each other, while Julian and I felt obligated to share observations on the weather.

Henry's bedroom was pretty much as I remembered although a bit neater, since there was no inhabitant to spoil the maid's routine.

It wasn't really a vault, it was a wall safe. Ilsa pulled away the painting of a steeplechasing horse.

"There." She had opened it. "Stewart, if you'll be so good."

I deposited the Polaris in a black velvet box sitting alone in the safe's cavity, closed the door, and spun the dial. I remember having two simultaneous thoughts: Ilsa is definitely up to something, and I hate being called Stewart.

"Thank you, dear. I didn't want to say anything before." There was an unsettling twinkle in her eye. "I know it's terrible not to trust one's own children, but there you are. I raised them. I ought to know what they're capable of."

Outside the bedroom window a bolt of lightning streaked in the distant sky. No audible thunder. Then, as if that sudden illumination had been the flash of a starting gun, the downpour began. It pounded in



even sheets against the double-hung panes.

Her eyes were focused on me as she said it. "I'm giving the Polaris to Julian Sieberg."

**T**he rest of the evening was one long shout. Years of unspoken resentment seemed to bubble up and explode, and things were coming out that I doubt they'd ever thought of saying, let alone in front of two unlucky onlookers.

Ilsa tried to end the bout by making an exit.

"Mother, come back here."

"I'm phoning the insurance company in the morning." She was striding down the corridor and all five of us formed another parade. "We'll change title of ownership and the name on the policy, and that will be that."

Marvin was right behind, walking briskly and yelling into her back. "I suppose you're going to pay the premiums for him, too. That's just great."

Marilyn gave up trying to match strides and broke into a light trot. "It was Daddy's diamond. He would have wanted me to have it."

Ilsa stopped in her tracks, forcing the rest of the traffic to brake. Marilyn dented her nose in the back of Marvin's jacket while Julian scuffed a toe on one of my heels.

She turned our way and glowered. "If you could just see yourselves, salivating like a pack of wild dogs." I assume this was directed to her offspring. "If for no other reason than to take the Polaris away from you—"

"Ilsa, they've got a point. Say what you will, these are your children. They're Henry's children. And they deserve more consideration. Why don't you wait a few months, see how things go." A calming hand on her shoulder. "You can always give things away, but you can't always get them back."

The only remarkable thing about this plea for common sense was that it came from Loverboy and not me.

"What are you saying, Julian? It's a present. You appreciate its uniqueness."

"But I don't want it, really." His look was sincere and firm. "I really don't."

Either way I had to admire him. Either he was being nobly unselfish, or else his acting ability and knowledge of human nature were up there with the best of them.

"Nonsense. It's an awkward situation I've placed you in, and you want to do the right thing. That makes me feel all the more strongly."

"I can't accept it, Ilsa, that's all there is to it."

Marvin and Marilyn were both rooting for Julian but knew enough to keep their mouths shut.

"Please, dear. The Polaris has always been a symbol of devotion. It was supposedly a gift from the sultan Schariah to Scheherazade. I'm doing this for myself. Let me be selfish."

"If you want to get me something, make it cufflinks. I lost my best pair on the cruise."

"Isn't he a dear?" She didn't wait for a reply. "No, Julian. It's yours. And nothing you or anyone else can say will stop me. Do you hear that, Stewart?"

"I haven't said a word." And I hadn't. I knew from hard experience about Ilsa's rare bouts of thought.

**T**he two wild dogs and I were in the foyer, coats on and listening to the thunderstorm. They were calmer now. We'd been there for several minutes, standing silently, not really expecting the rain to stop and not really waiting for anything, except perhaps Julian.

He showed up soon enough, jaunting down the main staircase, a leather valise in each hand.

"Thanks for waiting, Stew. I appreciate your giving me a lift."

"Is she all tucked in?" Marvin asked venomously.

"I'm not really the enemy." Julian was retrieving his coat from the closet. "You meet an attractive woman and you get to know her. You don't expect to become embroiled in a family war."

"Don't give me that."

"Look, I did my best to talk her out of it. A few days to herself and maybe she'll settle down."

"Julian!"

She was at the top of the staircase, dressed in a modest nightgown of white silk. She tried to make it sound casual. "Don't go, Julian, please." It was a disquieting sight, someone you've always thought of as a willful caricature turned suddenly fragile.

"Are you still planning to give me the diamond?" His tone was hard.

"I'm afraid so." Said as though an unseen power were forcing her to do it.

"You're really something, you know?" Julian stood at the foot of the staircase and you could read either frustration or admiration on his face, probably both. If you looked at his hands you could see his grip on the leather handles relax. "What am I going to do with you?"

And that was all it took. I knew it before the valises hit

the floor, before he walked slowly up the stairs, all the while shaking his head and chuckling. I knew I'd be driving back to Manhattan alone.

Well, not exactly alone. The three of us drove separate cars but all in sight of one another. Marvin's taillights were the only objects I could clearly identify as we struggled through the storm's full strength. Tree shadows filled my peripheral vision, their bare branches flailing as the Albany Post Road disappeared in the rush of water. The landmarks of night driving, the line down the middle, the luminescent signs, came and went, blurred and cleared, as the irregular gusts attacked my windshield and made the wipers useless.

Marilyn's headlights bit relentlessly into my rear view mirror. They were giving me a headache, so I twisted the mirror away. Why'd she have to follow so damned close?

A neon-lit motel sign punctuated the blur, as if to reassure us that we were still beside the roadside. I'd given up trying to see anything but Marvin's taillights and assumed that Marilyn was simply following mine.

That's when it happened. The Albany Post Road turned and

Marvin's taillights didn't. Instead they climbed a steep embankment, then stopped abruptly and waited for my headlights to catch up and plow into them. Which they did.

The second crash was nearly simultaneous with the first and felt a lot stronger. I had to remember to give Marilyn a lecture about tailgating.

My Chevrolet took the prize that night for "most damaged." Like the bellows of an accordion it was compacted from both ends in neat little folds. I sat leaning back in one of the middle folds, a mercifully large one, and spent two minutes between yelling at myself and thanking the patron saint of detectives, whoever that is. A few seconds later my limbs stopped shaking enough for me to put on my fedora and step out into the monsoon.

Marilyn's Italian miniature had front end damage as bad as mine. The only engine still working belonged to Marvin's Pontiac, which had been stopped in a slightly more gentle fashion by birch saplings and medium sized rocks.

A half-hour after impact Marvin and I had maneuvered enough rocks, saplings, and fenders to get the Pontiac back on the road. We remembered the neon as being just a mile behind us, and you never saw

three people so glad to find a vacancy sign.

The daylight would come, I told myself, the rain would stop, and the local tow truck operator would have a field day. But right now I needed dry towels, three aspirins, any excuse for bed, and no more Crowns until morning.

I don't know what made me call. It was the next day, about ten o'clock, and bright sunshine. We were just finishing a coffee-shop breakfast when I looked at the map-of-Westchester place mat, under my orange juice and found that all our frantic driving had propelled us only forty miles from the manse. For some reason it seemed a good idea to use the pay phone.

"Ilsa? This is Stew. I just thought I'd—"

"Stewart? Thank God. That secretary of yours said she couldn't get in touch with you."

"We didn't make it in."

"You have to come here right away. It's been stolen. The Polaris is gone."

**M**arvin insisted on my borrowing the Pontiac. He also insisted on riding back with me, and not wanting to be left out, Marilyn occupied the rear. The steering was a little loose and the alignment wobbly, but

the rest of the moving parts seemed to be moving fine.

"We told her! We warned her about him." Marilyn filled the rear view mirror, her green eyes flaring. "It serves her right."

"Shut up, Marilyn." The first really appropriate thing I'd ever heard Marvin say. "Nobody cares about your little feud with Mother. The important thing is to get it back. Could this Julian have left the country already?" He was talking to me. "I mean it's only ten thirty. The trail's still hot. Isn't that what you people say, the trail is hot?"

"How do you know he's run off?"

"What's he going to do, sit there and wait to be arrested?"

"Yeah, you think Julian's just going to stick around?"

"Shut up, Marilyn."

"I can think of a very good reason for him to stick around."

"What reason? And don't tell me to shut-up, Marvin."

"Well, maybe the poor guy didn't take it." I paused for about ten seconds, just to let it sink in. "It's a much more logical assumption that one of you did it."

Every job has its rewards. For an actor it's taking a bow or seeing them line-up for tickets. For me it's watching them get flustered. I felt a little robbed on this one. Marvin was just

working up to a good fluster when we pulled through the gates and around a bend of trees.

Waiting for us in the driveway were Ilsa and Julian, his comforting arm draped around her shoulder. The growing fluster on Marvin's face was immediately replaced by a frozen stare; not nearly as satisfying.

**H**enry's bedroom needed some tidying up. The steeplechasing horse was on the floor, having been pulled off its hinges. The wall safe was open and empty. The big oaken desk stood at a new angle, its drawers pried loose, and a pair of chairs were on their sides in the middle of the room.

All over the carpet were papers taken from the desk, and among them lay the fireplace poker, probably used to pry the drawers. The window nearest the bed was open, and on the floor were glass shards from the single shattered window pane, mixed in with a half ton of rain water. Altogether a mess.

"Was this the way you found it?"

"Naturally. I've been through a murder case, dear, I ought to know something." Ilsa and I were alone, carefully occupying the few square feet of undisturbed floor. Her bright hair

had not received the proper attention this morning and stood a bit too far from her head, like a fireman's helmet.

"No, wait a minute. The vault was closed and locked."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. I was nervous all through breakfast, maybe because of the commotion last night. I wanted to check on the Polaris and asked Julian to come with me. We walked in here and it was like this. I nearly had a heart attack."

"And that was when you opened the safe?"

"Julian opened it. I was too distraught. I told him the combina—" She saw the way I was looking at her. "Good heavens, Stewart, the Polaris was the only thing in there and it had already been taken."

"Never tell combinations. It's the principle."

"But it was already gone, I saw for myself. What's the use of keeping a cubic foot of dead air under lock and key?" A wry smile played on her mouth, then just as quickly left. "It was just a burglar, wasn't it? Say it was just a burglar."

"Ilsa, honey, I've got to ask this so don't get mad. Did you and Julian sleep together?"

She didn't get mad, but she blushed and nodded.

"Could he have left and come back without your knowing it?"

"No." Her embarrassment overrode any sense of outrage. "You see, dear, Julian and I enjoy cuddling. Not like Henry. Henry couldn't sleep in the same room with you. Anyway, we were rather heavily entwined last night, and we woke up in pretty much the same position. You'll have to accept my judgment on this, Stewart, but I don't think he could have gotten out and in again without waking me."

I accepted her judgment. She wasn't hiding anything, I knew that. Ilsa could be silly, but her pride would never let her be made a fool of, not knowingly.

Besides, where was Julian's motive? In all fairness he ought to be considered a victim. I mean, the man puts up a pretty good fight against being given the damned thing. So why would he turn around and steal it?

"I didn't telephone the police. I didn't know if I should. If it wasn't a burglar—" Her eyes wandered to a photo framed on the wall, little Marvin and Marilyn sitting on their ponies and smiling. "Handle it for me, Stewart, please?"

I said okay, although I really wasn't sure what "handle it" meant.

The next few minutes I spent on the phone—not calling the cops; there was plenty of time to call the cops if and when I

needed them. I called the local paper.

By the time I'd finished, the Crown children were no longer around and neither was the dented Pontiac. I had to tackle them eventually, but first decided to borrow the Rolls from Ilsa and retrace our flight.

It was a totally different drive. Hundreds of twigs and the occasional branch littered a much straighter road than I remembered. The lane seemed wider, the shoulder more generous, and the hairbreadth turns had dehydrated into gentle sweeps. I felt more than a little humiliated when I finally came across my trusty Chevrolet nestled up to the Italian miniature. They were picnicking on a hillside one hundred feet beyond a turn any blind man should have been able to make.

I pulled the Rolls to the shoulder and parked. I've never been a good driver. You'd think I would be, a detective who drives in Manhattan, but there you have it, a man of fascinating paradoxes. I climbed up the slope and surveyed the road as it curved back towards the homestead.

Could Marvin have missed the turn on purpose? He knew the road, having driven it hundreds of times. Of course he couldn't have counted on Marilyn and me joining in his little

accident, but then he didn't need us.

After seeing him take a close shave like that, the most natural thing in the world would have been for us to pull into the nearest motel. Then, while the other two were snoring away, an expert driver could take his time; forty miles to the mansion (in the middle of a blinding storm?), and forty miles back (with loose steering and a wobbly alignment?). That was my problem, I knew just enough to confuse myself thoroughly.

A police car was coming my way, followed by a tow truck. I could see Marilyn seated beside the state trooper, who, judging from his focus, was more interested in her statistics than those of the accident. Good. The fewer questions about last night, the better.

A tall kid wearing a tattered bomber's jacket hopped out of the tow truck and hiked up the hill, scratching his head. "One of these yours, mister? How the hell'd you do this?"

I explained as best I could, then helped guide his rig as he backed up the slope and stopped in front of Marilyn's fender.

"There was another car involved, a Pontiac. I'd like you to look at it and tell me about the damage."

"My brother's the mechanic. I do the towing." His head was

under the chassis as he attached a hook and cable onto some do-hickey or other. "Ken's great. He'll tell you anything you need."

"Be careful with that." Marilyn had pried herself loose from the trooper.

"Is this jobbie hers?" I said yes. "Do me a favor, mister, and keep her out of my hair."

My hand gently intercepted Marilyn's elbow and navigated her to a separate patch of hillside. I said the kid knew what he was doing and that I needed to talk to her.

"Don't worry about the trooper, Stew," she whispered, anticipating my first question. "The whole thing about the Polaris, it's no business of his."

"Good girl."

"Is Julian going to give it back?"

I explained my reasons for doubting Julian's guilt, including the necessary but embarrassing detail of the entwined sleepers.

"That doesn't prove a thing." Marilyn wasn't embarrassed. "He could have done it this morning after they got up. I mean at some point Mother must have gone to the bathroom or taken a shower."

"Sorry. I checked with the newspaper. The rain stopped about five A.M. Whoever came in that bedroom broke the win-



dow while the storm was still going strong. There's water all over the floor."

"Yeah, I saw. The room's a mess. Why is that, Stew? Why's the room a mess?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why would someone go to all the trouble of prying open drawers and throwing chairs around?"

"You're not as vacant as you pretend."

"I can be serious when it comes to important things. Well?"

"Well—maybe he, or she, wanted to make it look like a real burglary."

"Really? He must think we're pretty dumb." Marilyn's plucked brows were furrowed for a few seconds as something hit home. "Did you throw in that 'or she' for my benefit?"

"You and Ilsa."

"No, Stew." Marilyn shook her head. "Whatever else she might do, Mother wouldn't cheat for the insurance. It's gotta be Julian."

The manipulative lilt had disappeared. It was like another person talking, someone who'd forgotten about herself for a few seconds. Perhaps Marilyn would age well after all. Maybe there was just enough of her father in her to alloy the pure ego that had been Ilsa's legacy.

"You must think we're a pretty lousy family."

I made the usual denials.

"We *are* pretty lousy, Stew, but we're still a family. We'd never do anything to hurt each other."

I felt it necessary to point out that Ilsa's behavior with the diamond hadn't been the most family-like.

Marilyn laughed, the way you laugh at a kid who says something stupid. "She wouldn't have gone through with it." The lilt was coming back. "She was just getting our goat because we didn't jump for joy about her and Julian."

"Sure," I said, not really believing it. "Do you know the safe's combination?"

"I never asked and I was never told." Simple and direct, looking me right in the eye.

"And how about Marvin?"

The eyes lowered and a slow counter could have made it to ten.

"I don't know. Daddy might have—no." She looked up, trying to reproduce her simple and direct act of twelve seconds earlier. "Daddy wouldn't have told him. They never got along."

"You wouldn't be trying to protect him?"

"Protect Marvin? Don't be silly."

You can't have it both ways, hon. That's what I was think-

ing. You can't say there are still family feelings and yet you wouldn't try to protect each other. That doesn't add up.

I lay down on the bed in Cabin 12 and tried not to listen. Is a Rolls louder or softer than a Pontiac? I slept like a log last night, and the storm was making its share of noise, but would the Pontiac have awakened me, that was the question.

There it was, an engine starting up, its roar blasting through the paper-thin walls. I hopped off the bed and opened the door. Five feet in front was Ilsa's black and grey Rolls, our friendly motel manager behind the wheel.

"Is that all you wanted me to do?" He stroked the dash in admiration. "I could take her for a spin if you want."

"I just wanted to hear it. A Pontiac would be louder than that, right?"

"I guess." His eyes lit up. "Do you want one that makes noise? 'Cause I got a Cadillac, almost brand new, makes one hell of a din. I might be willing to swap."

I thanked him for his offer, replaced him behind the wheel, and headed over to Ken and Bill's Tow Service and Body Shop. I didn't know any more than I did before, and this was making me crazy.

Ken's brother, Bill I guess, was leaning against the soda machine and watching a pair of overall covered legs that stuck out from under the Pontiac.

"Good, he's working on it. I'll be able to get that opinion."

"How ya' doin'?" Ken's not here. Had to go into town to get a part for the Italian jobbie."

Before I could ask whose body was attached to the legs, I heard an unpleasantly thin voice coming from down under. "Is that you, Cavanaugh?"

Marvin Crown slid out on one of those little dolly contraptions. He picked himself up, stretched his wiry frame, and wiped his grease-covered hands on a rag hanging from the soda machine. "Ken lets me use the place. It was my bank that arranged the loan."

"Damn right. Ole Marv gets the run of the joint."

"That must be pretty convenient." I said it in my most sarcastic tone, but it didn't give me any satisfaction. "I suppose whatever was wrong is all fixed."

"If Marv ever gets tired of that dead-end job of his, we've got a pair of overalls waiting for him here." Bill laughed at his own joke with an unattractive guffaw that told me more than I cared to know about the boy's personality.

"Billy, go over to Henderson's and pick me up a sandwich."

"Sure, Marv, what kind ya want?"

"Any kind. Get one for yourself." Marvin handed him five dollars and made it obvious that he ought to get out of the way.

"You want ham? They got pretty good ham, but they don't always got it in." It was hard making things obvious to Bill.

"Surprise me. Hurry up. Get out of here." Marvin waited, no expression, until the tow truck operator had crossed the street.

"Okay, Cavanaugh. What's your problem? Why haven't you handed him over to the police?"

"It's hard for me to figure his motive. Not like you and Marilyn. I wouldn't blame you. Hell, if it was my mom, I might do the same, just to keep her from acting stupid."

"Marilyn wouldn't do anything as altruistic as saving Mother from herself. That'd be me, I guess."

"Not a bad motive. Keep it away from her until the romance cools. She'll probably thank you in the long run."

"That's hardly my style."

"What is your style, Marv?" We'd fallen into a game of cat and mouse, which was just what I wanted.

"Something a little more definite." He pursed his lips and thought. "I think I'd plant clues, all pointing to Julian, and then

we'd open up his luggage and it'd be sitting right there."

"Pretty sneaky."

"Two birds with one stone. Keep the Polaris in the family and the gigolo out."

My pulse picked up. It's funny about confessions. You get them in all forms, from a tear-jerking story to a simple "yes" to a hypothetical case like the one Marvin had outlined.

"That wasn't a confession, Cavanaugh."

"I know, I know." But I didn't know any such thing. I just needed those few seconds to piece it all together.

"Damn." The pieces didn't fit. "I suppose a nice boy like you has keys to the mansion?" One of those stupid questions you just have to ask.

"Sure." He pulled a silver key ring from his overalls. "Right here."

"Oh well, easy come, easy go. I just poked a hole in your theoretical confession."

"That's too bad." I think Marvin was visualizing himself as the cat.

"It's the window," I explained. "A man with keys doesn't have to break in. So why the broken window? Not to point things at Julian. He was already inside."

"I guess that scratches me."

"The only thing it scratches is your altruistic motive."

"Marilyn doesn't have keys. She'd have to break in."

"What?"

"I thought that'd cheer you up." He was enjoying my discomfort but, you'll notice, I was getting information.

"She lost them and wanted to have copies made from my set. I told her to remind me again before we left, but of course by then we were thinking about Julian and the necklace."

How I wanted it to be Marvin! Ilisa doesn't call the cops because it might be one of her kids. Marilyn is leaping to the family defense. These are good signs, I tell myself. The Crown family might have a future after all. And then, without a moment's hesitation, Sonny-boy goes after Sis.

My question about the combination got the expected denial. Although, he says, Dad might have told Marilyn. She and Dad had been pretty close. Oh, how I wanted it to be Marvin!

"They were out of Virginia ham, so I got boiled. That okay?"

Marvin took the sandwich, not really knowing what to do with it. "You hungry, Cavanaugh?"

"No, thanks. Billy, do you have an office where I can sit and work?"

He pointed me to a makeshift area in the far corner where

someone had put up wood paneling and thrown in a chair and desk and the same kind of calendar photo I'd spent my misspent youth examining in the little garage where Pop made his living. Garages never change. I guess I like that.

Marvin and Billy left together as I settled in and ransacked the desk in a futile search for index cards. What's an office without index cards? I found a small white tablet of notepaper. It would have to do.

They went down quickly, one at a time: a piece of evidence, a suspect, a quote, a feeling. A half-hour after I began they were all there, spread out on the desk, one per sheet. Put them in the right order and they'd sing a song. The trouble, of course, was finding the right order.

No matter how I arranged it, two pieces continued to stick out. Marilyn had brought up the first. "Why such a mess?"

I spent about an hour on one explanation: the thief was looking for something else. But what? Maybe the combination. Maybe Henry had left a copy of it hidden somewhere.

That seemed a bit farfetched, but I wrote it down anyway, surrounded it with question marks, and added it to my row of theories. Then I switched to the second.

"Why was the window broken?" I took another sheet, the last on the tablet, and wrote, "Window broken to set time of crime."

That certainly had a nice ring, but I couldn't for the life of me find a suspect to go with it. In a fit of exasperation I tore up all my theory sheets and just stared at the desk, stared without blinking until all the evidence sheets blended into each other. I was tired of manipulating paper theories—

Manipulation. That was it! The magic word that made everything jell. My ridiculous pride had gotten in the way. The thief didn't care about manipulating me. He didn't give a damn about some dimwitted detective. It was Ilsa who had to be manipulated.

I spotted my Chevrolet wallowing in a patch of mud by the garage doors. Unlocking the trunk, I retrieved my '38 from under my spare tire. In a matter of seconds I was in the Rolls, racing the forty-three miles back to the mansion and praying that my stupidity hadn't made me too late.

He was already in his car when I drove up. Ilsa was wishing him a safe trip when I interrupted, probably rudely, and said I had to see him alone.

"You'd better have a good

reason for dragging me in here." He was more curious than upset. We were in the organ room, named after the wall-long pipe organ that had been Henry Crown's one passion. "I've got to get back to the city. Business matters—"

"Shut up." The revolver came out of my jacket and aimed its barrel squarely between his too blond hairline and his too perfect eyebrows. "Okay, Julian, my friend, it's over."

I had to hand it to him. He didn't go into any useless protests where I had to explain everything a dozen times before he'd stop saying "I don't know what you're talking about." He was too classy for that. He simply looked back and forth between my unmoving face and the unmoving gun and said, "I see."

"I don't want to make a big production of this. I just want it back."

"Fair enough." The black jewelry case was in one of his leather valises. He opened the case, displayed the glittering necklace, then closed it again and gently tossed it to me. "What gave me away?"

"I couldn't figure out why the room was ransacked." I was shaking my head, amazed at my own denseness. "And then I remembered Ilsa's description; her shock upon seeing the

room in shambles, the fear that moment produced."

He smiled. "At first she tried opening the safe herself, but her hands were too shaky, thank God. She was far enough away when I unlocked it, and the case was black, that was helpful. All it took was a little sleight of hand."

"When did you wreck the room? I assume it was between the time you left her and the time you came downstairs with your bags packed."

"I knew she'd ask me back. You do a few of these and you know what to expect. There are always variations, but you learn to control things more subtly." He was as smug as possible for someone with a gun pointed at him. "You can't prove a damn thing, you know. If you'd brought a cop with you, it might have been different."

"I don't want cops. I just want you to disappear. Ilsa's had enough problems. She's never to know how close she came to being taken by a cheap crook."

He was on his feet. "I'll send her a nice letter. I'm devoted to my dear old mother and I could never leave the poor darling." He chuckled as he picked up his bags, but you could see his eyes wondering why I hadn't lowered the gun.

"Sorry, Julian." I re-aimed.

"Sorry?"

"I want the other one. The real necklace, not just the paste."

"I don't know what you're talking about." His class act was going down the drain. "That's the necklace I took out of the safe, Stew, I swear."

"I know. Now I want the one you switched at the dinner table. What do you think, I only figured out half of it? Come on. Why would you steal the Polaris right after she says it's yours?"

"It was cleaner that way. I'd never be suspected."

"No. This may be an old game of yours, but last night it hit an unexpected snag." I crossed my legs and rested the .38's barrel on my knee, still on target. This was going to take a while.

"You track down a rich widow, one with a nice chunk of jewelry. You do your homework, get to know her, and sooner or later she brings it out. That's when you do your magic. I suppose it happened when you crossed behind her. Is that when it happened?"

"Only this time you were too charming. She's going to give it to you, which is something you don't want because an appraiser is going to have to come in, and you'll be the number one suspect."

"The silly cow." The voice was barely audible. "I told her I didn't want it."

"Which only made her more determined. So what could you do? You already had the original, but now you're forced to switch them back. I suppose that was your plan, just to switch them back?"

"There would have been no harm done. A burglar breaks in and can't open the safe. The Polaris would be back in place and no one would appear the wiser. Except—"

"What happened, Jule? A slip-up?"

"It's too large to palm. You've got to do a switch like this in two parts." He was a professional explaining his craft. "You can't have her rush up and see both necklaces. So you put the first one away."

"And that's when she rushed up."

"The silly cow."

I was forced to cock the gun before he volunteered to open the other valise.

I was a lot more careful with this transfer, making him

slide it across the marble floor.

He managed the tiniest smile. "At least I've got my health."

"I'm not looking out for all the foolish women of the world, just this one."

"Thanks. How're you planning to return it without telling her the truth?" A malicious glint in his eye. "Or maybe you're not."

"It'd be a lot easier for me just to keep the damned thing, wouldn't it?"

That was just to irritate him. He deserved to be irritated. It took me two hundred index cards and the better part of a week before I gave it back with a story that cleared everyone and that everyone could swallow.

Even then I wound up taking some of the blame myself. But the Crowns are all talking to each other, even if they're no longer talking to me.

For a resolute bachelor, I guess I'm pretty much of a family man.



# An Exchange of Gifts

by  
Steve  
Lindley



**T**hey were playing Strauss in the park the first time I saw her, a tinny Strauss, strained through bassless PA speakers into thin, cold air. But it was Strauss, and though I learned later she didn't even know who he was, as she circled in front of me then it was as though he had written his music to accompany her movements that night.

She was skating on the ice; I was standing in snow. I had come into the park that Sunday to watch the sun set, but it was setting behind me while I watched her. You know how beautifully warm young women look in winter, their heads capped, hands mittened, red cheeks framing white teeth. She was warmer than that.

As she skated past me the hundredth time, she made a turn,

*Illustration by Judy Mitchell*



almost a leap. It was probably far from Olympic standards, but I wouldn't have known. I clapped my hands, taking off my gloves so she could hear me slapping my frozen palms red, a ridiculous-looking trained seal in coat and hat. Other skaters were rushing past me, but she knew they were only a background for her actions, and she laughed for me and turned again. We had made contact, the star and her audience.

She smiled at me the next time she passed, and finally stopped about a hundred feet down the lake to change into boots. I walked over to meet her. Her name was Helen. She was an actress, or at least wanted to be one. At the moment she was a waitress, but she didn't like to be reminded of that. She had no family, though maybe

that was just the impression she wanted to leave with me. She laughed, she spoke a thousand words a minute. I was still her audience. We talked about her dreams, her skating, her life, and of the fact that she was awfully late for everything she had to do and had no time for a cup of coffee with me. I hailed a cab for her and walked back home through the park alone, across the lake, holding her phone number in my pocket the way a child holds a new dime.

Halfway across the lake I stopped. I could no longer hear the music from the skating pond. The sun had set and it was dark. I didn't know how far I had walked or where I was, but I could feel water seeping through my boot. The ice crackled under my feet. I looked around, cursing myself for acting so childish, but could see no one.

I picked up my foot, which had sunk a good two inches into slush, and took one step back. The ice felt no firmer. In what little light the moon allowed I could make out some bushes about twenty long yards to my right. I made my way slowly towards them, dragging my feet six inches a step to try to keep the pressure even, holding my arms out like a man on a tightrope. I reached them after a long time and stood motionless, breathing short puffs of steam, clutching a skinny branch, and looking back at the gleaming wet tracks made by my shuffling feet.

Just another patch of ice. In my childish frame of mind I had thought the lake no different from the simple skating pond. I hadn't given a thought to its depth and the fickle way ice can form over a body of water; how one man can be standing on firm ice and watch another sink through a thin patch only a few feet away; how a man can disappear in a second and be trapped under the ice, unable to find the hole that had sucked him in. The thin ice was all around me, hiding water shallow and deep, and I had been strutting about it like a fool in a dream. But now, safe, with my feet on hard earth and knowing where I was, I could only smile, and I walked home on cold, wet feet, circling the lake entirely.

Helen had an answering service. She explained to me, later, that it was a "must" for actresses (or would-be actresses I was decent enough not to tell her). I must have phoned her twenty times, never leaving a message. It was an immature thing to do, I suppose, but I hated the machine. When she finally did answer in person, she agreed to meet me for drinks and maybe—just maybe—dinner the next Wednesday night.

I met her at a restaurant I thought would impress a young, poor waitress, thinking somehow to show her that there were a few assets in living the more staid, stable life I suddenly had the feeling my being radiated. I chose one atop a high-rise overlooking the park in which we had met, which seemed appropriately romantic in my newly impulsive Strauss-filled world. If she was impressed, she didn't let me know, though. We laughed all night and got just drunk enough and loud enough to make her look like a child and me a fool. And after dinner we walked through the park to my apartment, where we spent the night.

I woke the next morning to find her sitting up in bed beside me, smiling, her hair magnificently mussed. She found my lighter and lit a cigarette for me, then one for herself while I sat up beside her.

"Did I tell you," she said, picking up her endless stream of talk from the previous night, as though it had never been interrupted by our sleep, "how much I love—I mean really love—your apartment?"

"Actually, yes. But it's not really much," I said, trying to show a little humility after my extravaganza the night before. "You should see it when it's clean, though."

"Oh? It looks that much nicer?"

"I don't know. I've never seen it like that."

She didn't smile, just continued. "I mean . . ." There was a dramatic pause while she dragged on her cigarette. "You should see my place. A real rat hole. Literally. But, you know, until I find the right part in a play or something—"

"You live alone?"

"Yes. God, yes. I had a roommate once. Couldn't stand it. Couldn't stand her. And she was a close friend. God."

With that she threw herself out of bed, naked and with great grace, and walked quickly into the bathroom. I heard the shower a moment later. I was still smoking my cigarette when the water stopped and she came out, drying herself. She slipped into her pants and shirt, bent over and kissed me and straightened up again with all the emotion of a duck plucking a bread crumb from the water.

"Where the hell are you going?"

"Well, you didn't look like you were going to make me breakfast so I'm getting the hell out. No, honest, I've got millions of things to do, I gotta go. Call me." And she was out.

I spent most of that day reliving the previous night in my mind,

feeling exhilarated, feeling depressed, feeling young. I called her a few times during the day, but didn't reach her until that evening. She seemed quiet. I asked her if her day had gone badly, but she made no excuses. I was having a hard time keeping the conversation flowing and wondered if she noticed. Finally, carrying the phone to the stove to light my cigarette (I hadn't been able to find my lighter all day), I accidentally pulled the phone plug from the wall.

I redialed immediately, but her line was busy. It stayed busy all night.

I went back to the park that Sunday. They were playing disco, but I still heard the Strauss. Helen was there, sailing on the ice, turning circles and laughing. There were others with her, younger men and women. When she saw me she came over to me and began again her non-stop conversation.

With her prodding, I actually had the audacity to rent a pair of skates and join her on the ice. She complimented my horrendous attempt and we skated until I noticed her friends had left, then we again went back to my apartment.

I played the "Emperor Waltz" for her, since she seemed interested, though she asked me to lower the volume so she could talk. She wanted to be able to close her eyes and picture herself in Vienna, but I had no photographs of it and she was disappointed. Instead, we made love on the couch and slept on the rug in front of the fireplace so she could be near a small, antique clock on my mantel each hour as it chimed.

After that night, I saw Helen only on Sundays when I would meet her in the park. I soon realized I didn't even want to speak to her during the week and gave up phoning her answering service. When I was with her I was infatuated, but when she was not close enough to touch, I wondered if I even wanted to see her. What was charming with her on Sundays seemed childish in retrospect the other six days of the week. Her precious dreams I, alone, clearly saw were nothing but petty fascinations. My friends would ask me if I was seeing anyone, and I would tell them I was not.

But then came Sunday and she would be waiting for me in the park, sometimes alone, sometimes not, sometimes on skates, sometimes just standing, waiting.

She fell in love with the clock on my mantel. Once each hour we would have to be silent and listen as it chimed. She would close her eyes and I would watch her face, wondering where she was.

Finally, she asked me where I had found it. I told her it was a gift from my wife.

"You didn't tell me you were married before," she said, surprised.

"No. I guess I didn't."

"Are you, still?"

"No," I said. The simple, matter-of-fact tone in her voice as she asked the question took me by surprise. "She's dead. A while back, just after one Christmas. She gave me this clock that last Christmas. She liked antiques. I don't know why, she was very young."

"It's beautiful," Helen said, speaking of the clock. "Fantastic, really. I love to get gifts. It's nice."

"Well, you know, you give a gift of your own just by being with people." She looked puzzled, waited for me to explain. I had to clear my throat. "Well, it's not a gift, really. But it is. You make people feel good. Happy. Insane."

"Oh, that's great. The gift of insanity. Thanks a lot."

We were silent for a long time while she let me choke on what I had said. I watched her as she played with the clock in her lap. Finally she put her arms around it and smiled at me.

"Can I have it?" she asked.

"What? The clock?" I laughed, she didn't. "No. No, you can't have it. It was a gift from my wife."

"Oh, come on."

"No," I said, trying to laugh again. "I tell you what, though, next Sunday we'll go to a couple of antique shops. I'll buy you another."

She pouted. "What antique shops are we going to find open on a Sunday?"

I didn't say anything, but got up and went to the bathroom. Neither of us mentioned going some other day of the week.

"Put on some music while you're up," she called out.

"What do you want to hear? Say, you don't remember what I did with my Strauss' tapes that Sunday we were playing them? I haven't been able to find them since."

"How would I know? Anyway, I don't feel like hearing that now. And I'll bet you never did get me those pictures of Vienna like you promised."

She was right. I hadn't.

Helen was gone the next morning when I got out of the shower, a strange little trick she had performed a few times before, always leaving a cute note. I spent the day not thinking of her until that evening when I was looking for a book of matches. Suddenly I felt



as though something was lost and I had to know the time. It was a senseless feeling, but I looked at my watch. It was eight o'clock exactly, and I heard nothing. The clock on the mantel was gone.

I searched the apartment for it, knowing I wouldn't find it. Silly, a grown man tearing apart his home for a ridiculous little clock, or a cheap lighter, or a set of cassette tapes, but I felt more than silly. I felt hurt and humiliation slowly settling into loss and rage.

The sun was setting the next Sunday. She was skating. Snow fell lightly on my hat, covered my shoulders. I was standing far from the skating pond and she hadn't seen me, though I had been there for a long time. She wasn't looking.

I waited until it was almost dark, then went to the edge of the lake between two trees. I put on my skates, tied my boots over my shoulder, and went out onto the ice.

I skated the opposite direction from her. The first time we passed each other she didn't notice. The second time I circled around her. She saw me, but didn't smile until she saw me smile. Then she laughed and I laughed. The snow on her eyelashes made her blink.

I skated away and she followed. She came around me once, twice, in little circles, skating smoothly, perfectly. I went forward, clumsy but swift. I heard her laughing, heard the music dying behind me as we skated away from the pond. The only sound was that of our skates cutting the ice, splashing snow and slush as we moved farther out on the lake.

I was breathing hard. She called my name, then sailed in front of me, then fell back. I led her and she went beyond and back and around.

The front of my left skate cracked through the ice and caught. I fell on one knee, my other leg scrambling for a hold, got up and went on. She was still behind me, calling me. I thought I heard her fall once, then thought she called at me again and was up.

I could no longer skate. I took a step and plunged into water halfway up my calf. A few more steps and the ice broke completely under me. But there was bottom. I sank to my waist. Thrashing my arms around me, I staggered up to the shore and fell, my face in the snow, my breath melting a cup of air around my mouth.

I looked back for Helen but she wasn't there. Still, it was dark by then, and she might have turned back. It would have been the same thing to do.

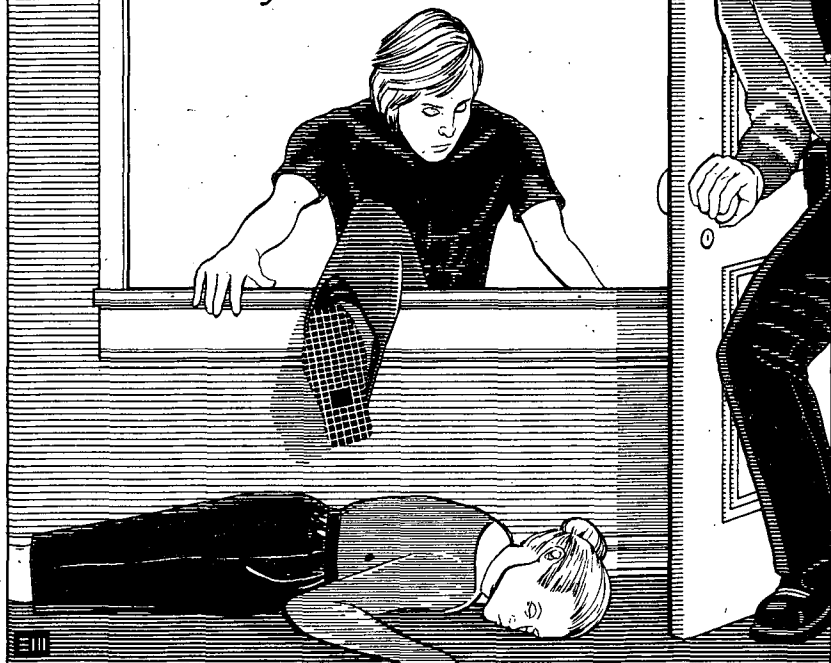
I went home then, walking away from the pond, circling the lake entirely on cold, wet feet, feeling tired, feeling very old.



FICTION

# INVOLUNTARY SUICIDE

by James A. Noble



**“L**ook, Winnie. We’re back in another mystery story,” said Thatcher, obviously pleased.

“Yes, dear. I know.”

“I suppose it’s because of the crackerjack job you did on the last one.”

“‘We,’ Thatch,” corrected

Winnie, smiling up from her knitting. “I couldn’t have solved it without your help. You think of many possibilities that never occur to me.”

“Usually wrong ones,” said Thatch. “Let’s see what we’ve got this time.” He looked at the title briefly. “‘Involuntary Su-

*Illustration by Eric Marcus*

icide.' Another way of saying 'murder,' it seems."

"A murder made to look like suicide. Our job is to figure out how it was done."

"How exciting," said Thatch, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "Would you like me to fetch a cup of tea or something before we get cracking?"

"You're so thoughtful, dear. Tea, yes, thank you. And while you're in the kitchen, would you get that ball of green yarn on the table? I'm almost out here."

Thatcher was gone only a few minutes before he returned with a cup of tea in each hand and the ball of yarn tucked under his chin.

Winnie helped him unload. "Thank you, dear."

"Tell me about the murder," said Thatch, getting comfortable in his overstuffed chair.

"Let's call it a suicide until we figure out how it was done," suggested Winnie. "The deceased is Elizabeth Turner."

"Certainly not the sort of woman who would take her own life," commented Thatch.

"I agree. Part of her success as a business woman was her optimistic attitude and her positive thinking. She kept very busy, but always remained cheerful. She trusted everyone, and unfortunately, it was that trait which may have contributed to her demise.

"After she retired as marketing manager from her company three years ago, she decided to have a go at writing a book about the techniques of marketing.

"She set up a room on the first floor of her house where she could work. In the room, she collected all her reference material, a desk and typewriter, and just about everything she needed to work on the book. She even had a gas stove installed so she could prepare coffee or small meals without having to disturb the butler or kitchen staff. To make sure that she wouldn't be bothered, she had a deadbolt lock put on the only door to the room. There was no keyhole for the lock on the outside of the door, and you could only lock or unlock it by turning a small knob on the door from inside the room."

"In other words, turning the bolt out and pulling the door shut from outside the room would not work," said Thatch.

"Correct. And there was no place for a key, so consequently, no key is involved."

"How about windows?"

Winnie took a sip of the tea before answering. "There was one window in the room with a standard latch for securing it. The only unusual thing about the window was that it was an extra heavy duty type, with thick safety-glass panes. Ap-

parently there had been a burglary at the home several years before in which the thief had gained entry to the house by breaking out one of the window panes, reaching in, and undoing the latch. Following that, Elizabeth had the stronger windows installed on all the first floor rooms to prevent a possible recurrence.

"According to her son Alvin, who lives in the house, Elizabeth had become very depressed lately about not being able to complete the book.

"On the morning of her death, she had come down from her bedroom and tossed him out of her workroom, where he had been typing a letter. He heard her lock the door behind her. The time was exactly ten o'clock in the morning.

"Having nothing better to do, Alvin went over to a friend's house, about a twenty minute drive, give or take. There he found several people playing poker. One of the players, who had been keeping track of the time because of a meeting he had to attend, noted that it was exactly twenty-five minutes after ten when Alvin arrived and took over his seat at the card game.

"At two forty that afternoon, Alvin got a call from a maid who had stopped by the Turner house to pick up some personal things.

"The maid was hysterical. She told Alvin that she smelled gas near the locked door to Elizabeth's room. Alvin told her to call the police. He hung up and hurried back home.

"He arrived moments after the police. He found them inside trying to break down the door. Alvin ran outside the house to the window of the room. Amazingly, it was unlatched, and he pushed it up just as the police broke through the door. Elizabeth was lying on the floor next to the stove. One of the patrolmen carried her body out of the room while another turned off the unlit burners on the gas stove. They tried to revive her but to no avail.

"The coroner fixed the time of death at about eleven twenty that morning and estimated that she would have lost consciousness at around eleven. Judging by the size of the room, he figured she must have turned the gas on shortly after she locked herself in at ten o'clock.

"Except for the typewriter, which was smashed to bits and lying on the floor next to the window, everything in the room was in order."

Thatch took a taste of his tea, which had cooled while he listened to the tale. "Alvin could have turned the gas on before Elizabeth tossed him out of the room and locked herself in. The

only problem with that idea is she would have detected its odor almost immediately. She could have turned off the stove or left the room . . . Ah, I have it.

"Perhaps Alvin had rendered her unconscious . . . possibly with drugs. Then he locked the door from the inside and left through the unlatched window to go to the friend's house."

Winnie shook her head. "According to the coroner, there were no foreign substances in her blood nor any marks indicating she had been knocked unconscious."

Thatch stared thoughtfully into space. "Maybe Alvin left the window unlatched so he could slip in and turn on the gas after Elizabeth dozed off."

"An excellent theory," observed Winnie. "Only Elizabeth was well rested, having just gotten up. Besides, there wasn't any sofa or cot in the room where a person could have taken a nap. Her body was found on the floor, but she hardly would have gone to sleep there . . . intentionally. No, Elizabeth was wide awake when the gas started filling the room."

Thatch shrugged. "If that's the case, then it appears as though her death was a suicide. She came downstairs, locked herself in the room, smashed the typewriter on the floor in frustration, blew out the pilot

lights on the stove, and turned on the gas."

"I don't believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because of the typewriter."

"Doesn't it make sense that someone who was depressed over an unfinished book might take their frustration out on the primary device used in writing it?"

A frown appeared on Winnie's face. "Then it should have been on the floor by the desk, not by the window. She wouldn't have carried such a heavy thing over to the window just to smash it on the floor."

"How do you see it?"

"I think she was trying to break through the window. I believe she was trying to escape from the room. That's what made me do a little more checking on Alvin Turner."

"Nonsense. She could have walked out of the room, left through the unlatched window, or turned off the gas."

"No, she couldn't."

"And why couldn't she?"

"Because of this." Winnie reached under her knitting for a small paper sack, which she emptied. Three packs of matches, two drill bits, a small pair of needlenose pliers, five cents in pennies, a nail, and a tube of glue clattered onto the coffee table.

"Where did you get all that?"

"I went to see Alvin the eve-

ning of Elizabeth's death. You know, to offer my condolences and to see if I could be of any help. Unfortunately, I accidentally spilled an entire cup of tea on his trousers. Naturally, he changed and I took an opportune moment to see what he had in his pockets."

"Accident, my foot. You stole all this junk?" said Thatch, looking at Winnie disapprovingly.

"It's not junk, it's evidence. This is all Alvin needed to trap Elizabeth in the room and prevent her from turning off the gas."

Thatcher picked up the tube of glue. "What? He glued the door shut?"

"Of course not. If you read the directions on the tube, you'll see that it takes two hours for that glue to harden. I knew he used that on the stove when I saw none of the knobs to the burners was turned in the same direction.

"He drilled out the holes in the back of the knobs so they turned on their shafts. Then, when he heard Elizabeth coming downstairs, he turned on the gas with the needlenose pliers, put the glue in the holes in the knobs, and slipped them back over the shafts on the stove.

"No doubt when Elizabeth tried to turn off the gas, the knobs turned freely because the

glue hadn't hardened. A couple of hours later, after the glue had set and Elizabeth was dead, the police arrived and shut the gas off. They never realized what had been done to the stove."

Thatch picked up a pack of matches. "And he took all the matches out of the room so she couldn't light the stove and prevent the gas from filling the room."

"Precisely."

"But how did he keep her from unlocking the door and walking out? I don't see anything on the table that could have done that."

"The pennies," replied Winnie. "It's an old trick. On doors with deadbolt locks, if you push very hard on the bottom of the door from the outside and insert a small stack of pennies in the space between the door and the jamb, the pressure on the bolt of the lock against its receiver is so great it can't be retracted.

"When the police broke down the door, they never looked down and noticed the few pennies nearly hidden between the jamb and the door."

Thatch pushed his finger through the pile of things on the table. "That leaves us with one more drill bit and a nail and the method by which Alvin prevented Elizabeth from leaving through the window."

Winnie nodded. "Alvin em-

ployed a variation of a technique many people use to secure their windows. If you drill a small hole where the two sashes overlap, just deep enough to penetrate the second sash, and insert a loosely fitting nail, the window can't be opened.

"Most people drill the hole from inside the rooms to deter burglary. Alvin drilled his from outside the house. Elizabeth undid the latch but couldn't raise the window because of the nail.

"When Alvin raced outside to 'rescue' her via the window, he slipped the nail out of the hole and opened the window easily. He knew Elizabeth would already be dead after being in the gas-filled room for four hours."

"Amazing," said Thatch. "I wonder why she didn't leave a note or something to incriminate Alvin."

"For the same reason she didn't employ a few tricks of her own to overcome Alvin's trap. She thought she was just a victim of circumstance, not of a murder attempt.

"The lock was broken, the stove was malfunctioning, the window was stuck. Natural things, that in her mind could have just happened. She never suspected they were Alvin's doing. If she had, she would have asked herself how he did it and possibly saved herself."

"Do you think there's enough proof here to have him arrested?"

Winnie smiled. "Not really. He can fabricate almost any story to explain glued knobs or the hole in the window sash, but he won't be able to explain an attempt on my life."

Thatch gasped. "An attempt . . . Good heavens! That's right. He must have discovered you took this junk."

"Evidence."

"Junk, evidence, whatever. He's probably on his way here right now to silence you for good." Thatch leaped from his chair. "Now where did I put my pistol?"

"Will you calm down, dear. Alvin has already been apprehended. I had two police officers stationed right outside the house. They nabbed him early this morning while you were snoring away. Besides, you sold that pistol nearly twenty years ago."

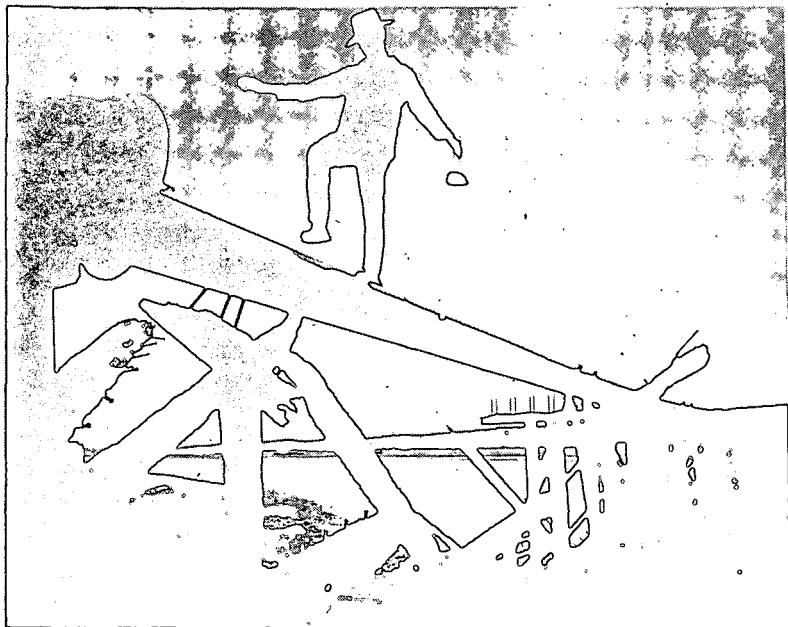
Thatch appeared much relieved and flopped back into his chair. "I didn't, you know."

"Yes, you did. To that antique dealer who had never seen an original flintlock pistol before."

"That's not what I was referring to. I meant that I did not snore. I never snore."

Winnie's knitting needle missed a loop.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

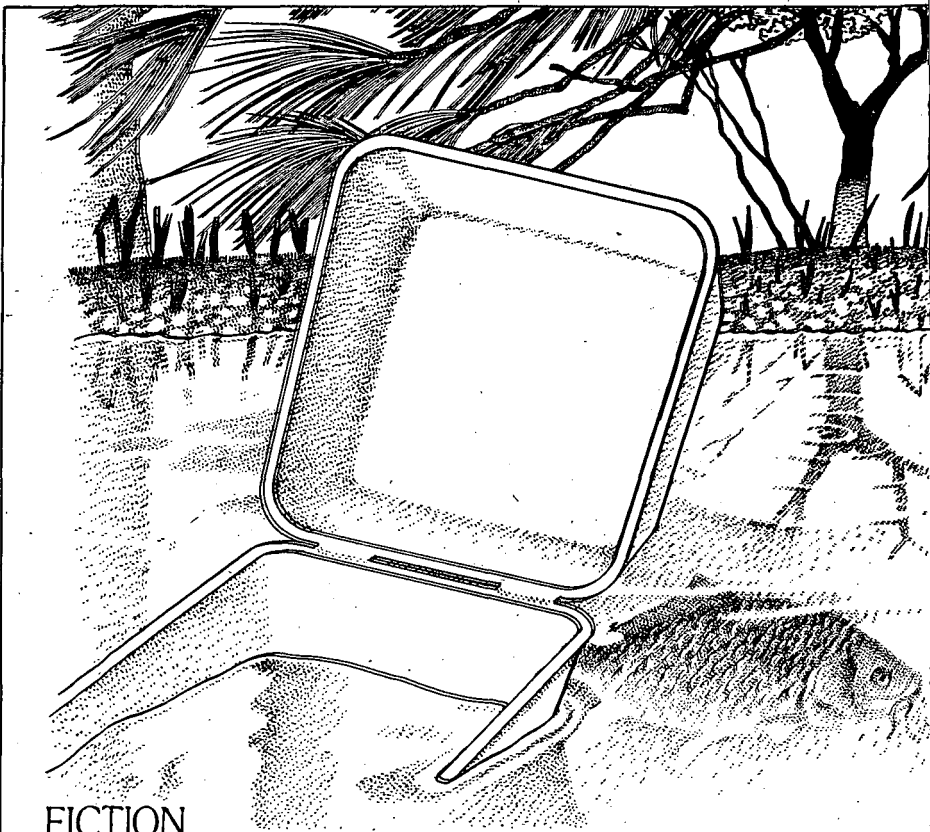


Arthur Tress

A case of crossing the bar? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the December Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 154.





FICTION

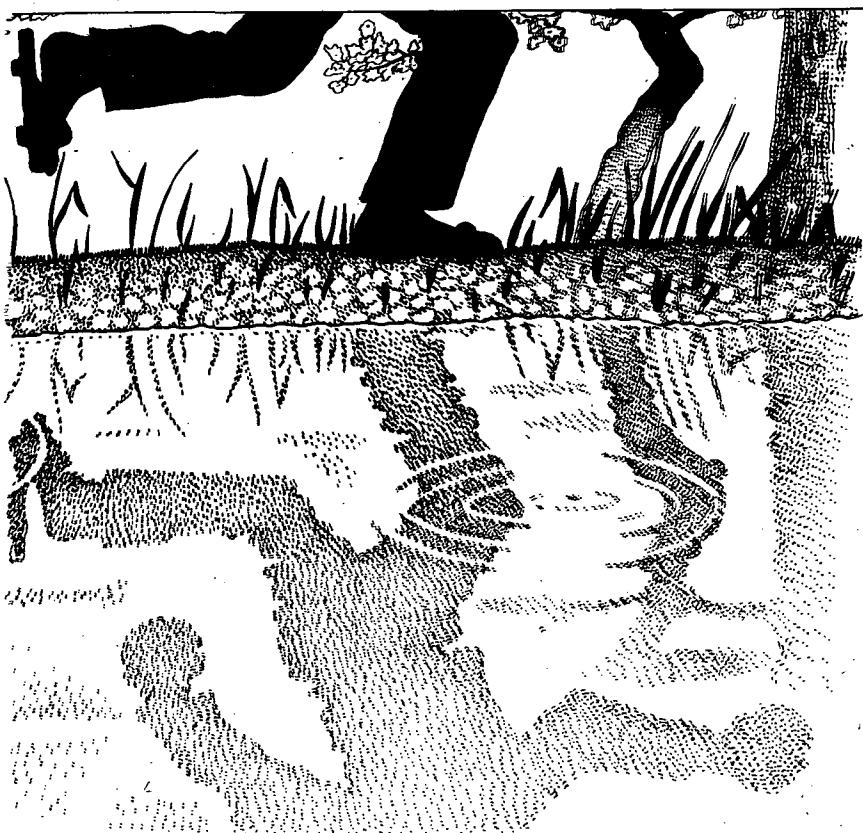
# The Case of the Numbered Navel by Ron Butler

“**C**ould it be that you have grown tired of Japanese food?”

Okayama Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki asked with a lopsided grin as he made himself comfortable on my office sofa. “Is this whim of yours evidence that you are homesick?”

I made a neat stack out of signed contracts. “Not so, Toshihiko. All I’m saying is that hamburgers and french fries

*Illustration by Glenn Wolff*



would hit the spot for a change. There's a new fast-food franchise over by Nishigawa Ryokudo Park, and today's paper has a coupon special—buy one hamburger, get one free.”

“Ah, so,” my father-in-law said, withdrawing a cigarette from a pack. “Now I understand. Today it is your turn to pay for lunch, and the coupon conveniently relieves the drain on your wallet.”

“Thrift,” I came back, “is a virtue, and besides, a delicacy like burgers begs for double compensation. How often do I get such a treat?”

“Actually,” the inspector said with a distant look in his eyes, “I became quite fond of hamburgers when I was a student in America. I prefer them medium rare, with onions and tomatoes. Would your budget be strained if I ordered two?”

"All you want," I pledged.

"Hamburgers? Fried potatoes?" Masahige Goto, the associate director of my computer hardware company, was standing at the open door. "I have always wanted to try those celebrated foods."

It would take, I believe, a man with a soul stone dead not to seize every opportunity to promote the exports of his native land in a country with a reputation for selling more than it purchases. I invited Goto to come along, and he assented with a smile, slipping off his sleeve garters and hitching up the knot in his tie.

In the parking lot adjoining our office building, Goto offered to take his car. Ueki and I looked at each other. Gotô's a good driver, but his auto is one of those super-compact jobs that remind me of toys—economical, but severely confining to people with long legs, like Ueki and me.

Politeness prevailed, however, and the inspector and I pressed our way into the back. When we were positioned elbows-to-doors, Goto unlatched the dash compartment, donned a pair of white driving gloves, and flipped the oversized plastic dice suspended by a slender chain from the rear view mirror.

This ritual with the gloves and good luck charms seldom fails to send me off into realms of secret entertainment. Automobile worship in Japan at least equals, and possibly surpasses, that in the States. Cars are locked religiously despite the notable rarity of theft, and in the interior one often may find curtains, covers for the steering wheel, all kinds of hanging and dangling doodads, and antimacassars for the seat backs.

As I began to take in the outside sights of Okayama from the window, I found other sources of amusement. Among the tea shops, greengrocers, pachinko parlors, and fruit stands were several new establishments that reminded me of home: pizza joints, a doughnut shop, and a fried chicken place with an English sign indicating that the recipe was among the best from a state known for its thoroughbreds, bourbon, and improbably colored grass.

The city's newest park had been called an oasis of greenery by one of the English-language newspapers. The designation was apt. On both sides of a canal flowing from north to south through the center of Okayama were more than twenty thousand trees, along with fountains, man-made wa-

terfalls, terraces, and resplendent beds of varicolored flowers.

If anything was out of place there, it was the hamburger emporium, which took up one corner of a busy side street. A steep-pitched roof of orange pantiles sat atop walls of stucco painted in paisley designs. Behind the sparkling plate glass of the broad double doors, employees in blue uniforms and white caps were busy assembling and packaging, and as we entered, they paused to sing out a welcome.

The lighted menus on the wall behind the counter were in Japanese, which I read with all the skill of a first grader, but using my best Okayama dialect and a broad smile, I put in a verbal request for two hamburgers with the works, a large carton of fries, and a soft drink. Ueki and Goto followed my lead but chose iced tea instead.

I gave the cashier my coupon and the necessary cash, then recommended that we take our lunches to the park, where we could enjoy the fresh air of a balmy spring day. This was approved unanimously, and after Goto asked me for some extra napkins we strolled across the street.

"Will this do?" Ueki said, nodding his head at the spot of his choice. It would. We spread

the napkins and sat crosslegged near a pool fretted by the gentle splashing of a miniature waterfall. In the clear depths, carp circled about in plump majesty, seeming to stare up at the pink and white blossoms drifting down from the plum trees.

I got up and drew closer to the water. "Look at the one over there—the big white one! Must weigh close to five kilograms!"

"Six would be more accurate," Ueki said, walking over to my side.

Goto put his fries down and came to make his own assessment. "Eight kilograms, no less," he insisted.

We were refining our guesses vigorously when a rail-thin young man who looked like he borrowed his wardrobe from a scarecrow came running down the path. He paused just long enough to grab a hamburger in each hand, then sped away with a grimly determined look on his face.

"Stop! Police!" Inspector Ueki's command and his quick pursuit had no visible effect on the lunch thief.

Meals forgotten, Goto and I joined in the unexpected race.

**H**e was more than fleet, Tomio Shioda. Ankles seeming to windmill, he darted first to one

place, then another, like a dust devil in human form. Every time the inspector ordered him to halt, Shioda picked up speed, and the two thoughts uppermost in my mind were, that we could kiss two burgers goodbye and that no one should enter a marathon without adequate training.

The sudden and literal downfall of our latter-day Mercury was the result not of a heroic sprint by Inspector Ueki but a child's rubber ball, carelessly dropped, lying unnoticed and harmless until one of Shioda's feet pounded down on it, sending him flying headlong into a hedge of tea plants. Shioda did not attempt to flee again, nor did he resist when Inspector Ueki, chest heaving from the exertion of the chase, grasped him by a shoulder and turned him over. Face haggard and pinched, the captive stared up at us with dull eyes. There was a dark mark over his right cheek that I took for a contusion, his hair was unkempt and matted, and I had the feeling that he'd been a stranger to the bath for many days.

"Why?" the inspector asked after he placed the young man under arrest. "What you did was brazen. To steal . . . to steal *food* is almost beyond belief. Yet that is what you have done,

and although you are little more than a boy, do you not know about dignity and respect for the rights and property of others?"

Shioda sat up stiffly, keeping his eyes on the hamburgers that were jarred from his hands when he fell. "I am sorry. Excuse me, please excuse me, but I was so hungry. I am known as Tomio Shioda, and I come from Hiroshima Prefecture. I have looked for work everywhere, but there is none for me—nothing."

I couldn't have been more startled if Shioda had confessed to being a murderer. To meet someone who was jobless and starving was a stunning deviation from the general prosperity I associated with the industrious people of the Japanese archipelago.

From watching television documentaries on domestic problems, I knew that there was a small element of poverty and unemployment. In one city, there had been instances of roving youth gangs attacking men they called bums and derelicts, touching off a national scandal when a vagrant was stabbed to death near a flophouse.

"Damned curious," I said to the inspector after thinking things over. "Maybe you should find out a little more about this

fellow before you take him in. He doesn't act like a hardened criminal. Doesn't talk like one, either."

"We saw him take what was not his."

"*Hai*," Goto said, "but it is extraordinary that we should meet a young man without the means to purchase a simple bowl of rice in our prosperous city. And he does appear to regret the theft sincerely."

Inspector Ueki scrutinized his prisoner carefully. "I am willing to listen to your explanation of how this came to be. However, it is my duty to enforce the law regardless of my personal feelings."

Shioda looked at us blankly, not seeming to comprehend what was wanted.

"Come on," I exhorted him. "It won't hurt to tell how you got in this mess. Is this the first time you've swiped something?"

For a moment, I thought he was going to open up. Instead, Shioda raised his head to watch a flight of gulls making a raucous passage through milky blue skies toward the Inland Sea, then fell back, head lolling to one side.

Ueki quickly pressed two fingers against a carotid artery. "His pulse is fast and irregular. Goto-san, please call for an emergency vehicle."

Goto hurried to a pay phone across from the park, and I gave the unconscious youth a closer look. The spot over his cheek wasn't a bruise, but a birthmark of brownish gold that was the size and shape of a raspberry.

Inspector Ueki stepped back and lighted a cigarette. "I believe, Sam, that he has fainted from hunger."

On the ground, near Shioda's feet, ants were swarming on the hamburgers he had dropped. I picked up the ruined food and threw it in a litter barrel. "Think he'll be all right?"

Ueki ran a hand down the back of his head. "I do not know, Sam. I have never seen starvation before."

There wasn't much going on at the office that day, so I took off early and met Inspector Ueki at the hospital. Tomio Shioda's condition was not dangerous, but the attending physician warned us that continued inadequate nutrition and vitamin deficiency would lead to grave medical consequences.

When we went to see Shioda, we found him sitting up in bed, sipping fruit juice. "I have caused much trouble," he said timidly.

On the other side of the room

was a second patient, a man who appeared to be in a deep sleep.

"Glad to see you're feeling more chipper," I said to Shioda. "You had us worried back there in the park."

Bathed and dressed in light green hospital pajamas, Shioda's boyish appearance was pronounced. "It is strange," he said awkwardly, "to hear people I tried to steal from say they were worried when I . . . when I became ill. I do not know your names, and cannot apologize properly for my action."

"You have already expressed your sorrow," Ueki said, pulling two chairs up to the bedside, "but I am Toshihiko Ueki and this gentleman is Sam Brent, my son-in-law."

Shioda placed his glass on a tray and I noticed that his hands were trembling. "Yes, Ueki-san," he said. "I remember that you are a policeman. Do you want me to go to jail now?" He started to pull down the bedclothes.

"No," Ueki said, shaking his head. "You can go nowhere until you are stronger. If it does not overtax you, can you explain how you arrived in our city in such deplorable condition?"

This time, Shioda complied. His accents rang of the country,

unsophisticated and lacking the graceful rhythm and grammatical precision found in the larger cities. He spoke of three acres of farm land where parents and children labored together to produce the cabbages, onions, soybeans, and rice that were their sole livelihood.

Life at home (he said) was difficult but not unpleasant. The affection between his mother and father also embraced Tomio and his two brothers and one sister. Although the best of crops yielded little for luxuries, they were grateful, thanked the gods for what they had, and hoped someday to have enough money to buy another small portion of land.

"You were happy at home, were you not?" Inspector Ueki asked, and Tomio let his woes drop away for a time, smiling reflectively as he dipped into the well of memories. He recalled trips into the hills with his father to cut firewood for the bath, and singing with his sister and brothers as they waded through the flooded paddy with their mother, setting out rice plants. On occasion, they would make up gift packages and walk the mountain trails together to visit relatives or old family friends. And each year, under a harvest moon, Tomio's father



would take his family to the nearby village, where chanting youths carried a portable wood shrine in a winding torchlight dance as they gave thanks for the first crops from the fields.

Tomio's smile faded then, and he sketched the events of the past few months that had brought him to Okayama. His father, though only in his late forties, had long been afflicted by a painful and crippling arthritis. Each day he took the herbal remedies—the powders and potions—sold by a salesman who made his rounds on foot twice a year. After a time, Mr. Shioda admitted the ineffectiveness of the home treatments and journeyed to the closest town, where he enlisted the services of a physician.

Nothing, however, helped for more than a few hours, and one night Tomio's parents told their children they were going to sell the farm and live with Mr. Shioda's brother in the village.

"The money I have been offered," Mr. Shioda had said, "is fair, but payments will be made in small amounts at the end of every year, and I cannot give you much at one time. I will do what I can to help each of you get started in a new life."

Mr. Shioda's daughter, whose wedding date was fast nearing, said she would need nothing,

and Tomio's brothers proudly disclosed the fact that they had been accepted as volunteer foot soldiers in the Home Defense Force.

That left Tomio, and he felt that his responsibility was clear. He was, at seventeen, too old to be dependent on his parents and had an obligation to make his fortune so he could repay them for the years of care they had provided.

"I will go to Hiroshima and find work," he told them, adding that someday he would buy back the farm and restore his parents to their ancestral home.

Reluctantly, Tomio's mother and father consented, and a month ago he had embarked on his quest with twenty thousand yen, a sum that Mr. Shioda feared would be insufficient, but which Tomio regarded as overly generous.

Listening to carts loaded with medications being wheeled down the hallway outside the hospital room, I thought I understood what had happened: without training, with no experience beyond farming, all Tomio could obtain was infrequent and poorly paid menial labor. Then I remembered what he had said in the park—that he had not been able to find anything at all.

Inspector Ueki voiced his own

analysis. "I assume that you did not attend high school, so there was *no* work for an unskilled lad fresh from the country in any of the places you visited. You exhausted your scant funds, and then . . . you went hungry."

Tomio affirmed this. He said that he had arrived in Hiroshima minus a thousand yen spent for buses. He soon learned that restaurant meals were far beyond his means, and limited himself to two hardboiled eggs and a bowl of noodles daily. Unable to afford the humblest of inns, he slept in the open.

Weeks later, his belt clasped at the last hole in the worn leather, Tomio was down to a few thousand yen and still had no prospects for employment. One night, as he prepared to sleep behind a concession stand at Peace Park, he resolved to quit Hiroshima to try his luck in the smaller towns to the east. Accordingly, he began the long walk out of the city at dawn, stopping long enough to use one of the inexpensive public baths.

"That is how I came to Okayama City," Tomio concluded. "I was turned away in every town I went to, and was so hungry when I got here that I was trying to pick up some of the food people throw out for the fish and birds in the park. When

I saw your lunches on the napkins, I . . . I am ashamed!"

"You mean you *walked* from Hiroshima to Okayama?" I said, wanting very much to distract Tomio from the guilt he was experiencing. "That's got to be at least a hundred and forty kilometers. You made darned good time, seeing that you stopped at a lot of places on the way."

Tomio allowed himself a modest smile. "*Hai*. In truth, I ran most of the way between towns. It made the hours pass faster and helped me forget my . . . my troubles."

"Young man," Ueki said kindly, "your story of running all that distance is credible. We have already witnessed your speed."

For the next few minutes, Tomio rambled on about how he loved to see how fast—and how far—he could go on foot, of how, chores and weather permitting, he spent his free time rushing up and down mountain paths, sometimes running to the village and back on some errand for his parents.

"There was no one I could not outdistance," he said, "including the boys who were much older. But mine is a useless talent, paying nothing. I deserve to be put in jail."

"Indeed," we heard a mascu-

line voice rumble, "that is not at all what you deserve!"

The patient on the other side of the room, a man of considerable bulk, clambered out of his bed and approached us. "I am going to show you a way out of this predicament," he said. "From now on, you work for me!"

I gave the inspector one of my "now what?" looks and waited to see what was coming next.

**H**is name was Kazutoshi Mizumoto, he was a publisher by profession, and, to hear him tell it, he was going to give Tomio Shioda a helping hand, an unprecedented opportunity for self-improvement.

"I overheard your conversation," the rotund publisher said, "and I was impressed by your determination. What would you think, Master Shioda, of selling subscriptions to a new magazine I am undertaking? If you show promise, you can work your way up, avoiding, I hope, the ulcers that have forced me to this bed."

Inspector Ueki asked Mizumoto about his work and the name of the new publication.

"Oh," said Mizumoto with a chuckle, "I am known—quite correctly, I must admit—as the king of exciting stories. I am

sure that you have seen one of my productions, *Unworldly Adventures*, at the newsstands. Now I am coming out with something to be called *Okiyama Living*. It will contain articles on our city's history, its current industrial and artistic accomplishments, famous citizens, architecture—things like that."

"Might be just the thing," I commented. "Sounds like a good family-type magazine. How about you, Toshihiko? Like the idea?"

Inspector Ueki paced to the window and back. "I suppose so Sam, but I will insist that he report to me periodically so I can determine that he does not stray."

"Good! Very good!" Mizumoto grinned. "Do you agree, Master Shioda, to take one of the sales positions we have open? There is much to do by way of garnering more subscriptions before the first issue."

"Oh, yes!" Tomio said. "I will do my best, and I will never disappoint Inspector Ueki or Bulentu-san."

I smiled. "Okay. We've got to be getting home for dinner, so we'll leave the two of you to work this out. When will you be discharged, Tomio?"

"Tomorrow or the day after," he said. "But, Bulentu-san and

Inspector Ueki, I have no money to pay for the hospital bill, and no medical insurance. What can I do?" The blush that followed his question accentuated the hue of his birthmark.

"Sam," the inspector volunteered for me, "will pay for it, and you will reimburse him from your salary."

"Generous of you," I muttered, but I really wasn't put out. A fellow like Tomio, motivated by gratitude, would have the cash back in my billfold in no time flat.

On our way out, we stopped by the cashier's office, and I made arrangements to pick up the tab.

"Glad everything turned out okay," I said, stamping papers with my signet. "Tomio seems like a nice kid."

Ueki checked the time on his wristwatch against a wall clock. "As a policeman, I will probably retain my suspicions until Master Shioda proves he is of good character, but I do wish him luck. In the meanwhile, Sam, do you have any ideas about where Master Shioda can live until he is paid?"

I did, but it was going to take some consultation. "Let me mull it over."

Driving home, I entertained visions of Tomio's so impressing his boss that he was taken

off subscriptions and moved up to the main office, becoming a renowned editor and then, still in his prime, the head of a vast publishing concern. Naturally, he would never forget one of his early benefactors—Sam Brent. And, if I ever decided to look for the right publisher for my memoirs . . .

The prospect of happy endings makes me feel good, and I wanted this one to work out smoothly. Would Noriko go along with my plan? Of course she would, once she met Tomio in person!

I made the turn into Tsushima District on that optimistic note. Close to home, but . . . wouldn't Noriko be more receptive to my suggestion if I showed her how much I cared for her? I kept on going straight, swung left at the Tsushima Tei noodle shop, and stopped at the supermarket. Twenty minutes later, I was armed with a box of sweets and a basket of fruit shipped in from Okinawa.

Two uniformed cops were parked by the house in their cruiser when I pulled up into the gravel lane. They walked up to me as I got out.

"Bulentu-san?" one of them said. "Inspector Ueki has asked us to inform you that he will be here as soon as he finishes interrogating people at the hos-

pital about what befell a certain Mr. Shioda."

I felt like someone had jabbed a stick in my solar plexus. "Tomio! I can't believe it! We saw him just a little while ago, and he looked like he was recovering!"

"Ah, no, that is not it," the second officer said. "Shioda did not die. We have little information, but I believe he is absent from the hospital. The person who shared the room with him was sleeping at the time of his disappearance."

Before I could ask another question, Inspector Ueki slowly drove across the narrow bridge in front of our house. Coming up behind, smiling as his bare feet slapped down in easy cadence, was Tomio Shioda, once again dressed in his ragged clothes.

"Noriko!" I called through the entranceway door. "Could you put some coffee on, love? I think we're in for an interesting evening."

Over the years Inspector Ueki and I have argued, usually amiably, about many matters, but on one subject—Noriko's ability to see the basic nature of other people—we agree totally.

Noriko liked Tomio, and he

reciprocated. So, when I brought up my proposal for Tomio to stay at our home until he was settled in his new post, my wife smiled and said she thought that everyone concerned would be pleased by such an arrangement.

"Hai," said Yumiko, adding her approval, "but there is much to do." Our live-in nanny, well into her eighties, then launched into what she called indispensable needs: new clothes for Tomio, a rearranging of the upstairs so that our twins, Kenji and Jotaro, could move in with Yumiko while Tomio took their room, and meals designed to flesh out Tomio's skinny frame.

The only person to express reservations of any kind was Inspector Ueki. "I, too, have a liking for this boy," he said after Yumiko invited Tomio along for a walk with the boys. "Yet, Sam and Noriko, he is unknown. Will you be at ease knowing he is in your midst? I am afraid that his lack of education provides a proclivity for trouble."

Noriko spooned up *odamaki-mushi* for a light before-dinner snack and placed the bowls of noodle custard on the kitchen table. "With our help, Father, Tomio will learn. All of us will do what we can to hasten his adjustment to city life." She ca-

ressed the back of my neck. "Sam was most considerate in offering to share our home."

I knew that I wasn't afraid to have Tomio around my family, but Ueki's remarks about the possibilities for trouble stuck with me. There was, for example, the fact that Tomio had left the hospital without telling anyone after Publisher Mizumoto gave him an advance on his salary.

When hospital officials notified the police of Tomio's unexplained departure, Ueki had hurried back to question Mizumoto. The publisher had ventured the opinion that Tomio meant no wrong in leaving—that he might have wanted to save Mr. Brent the cost of additional hospital care.

"Where do you believe Shioda might be?" the inspector inquired.

Mizumoto said he had no inkling, that he was dozing when his roommate walked out, but that Ueki should not concern himself. "Master Shioda knows the address of my firm, Inspector Ueki. He accepted money from me and gave his word that he would be there Monday, the day I am to be released. Right now, I would not be surprised if Master Shioda is looking for inexpensive quarters."

Ueki, worried that Tomio was

a rural sheep among urban wolves, dispatched some of his men to search for him. Then, on his way to my house, the inspector spotted Tomio jogging past the entrance to Okayama University.

Tomio had seemed to be genuinely happy to see the inspector, stating that he had, in fact, given up his hospital bed to save Brent-san's money, and that, with Mizumoto-san's advance, he intended to keep running until his feet took him to a place where he could eat and sleep for a modest sum.

"Master Shioda," Ueki had said sternly, "you are several kilometers from the hospital. Why did you not go to the central districts to find a hotel?"

Tomio had looked disconcerted. "It did not occur to me."

The inspector accepted the explanation and instructed Tomio to get in his car and go with him to my house. Tomio had asked if they had far to go, and if not, would it be all right if he ran behind the automobile—to see if his strength and endurance had been restored.

To his own wonder, Ueki consented, asking himself for the rest of the short distance to my home what it was about Tomio Shioda that tempted people to go out of their way for him.

Now, standing on the veran-

dah with Noriko as Ueki drove off in the rapidly fading daylight, I reasoned that many people wanted to do things for Tomio because they sensed his many good qualities. As Yumiko brought her charges along the earth dike of the rice paddy near the house, I saw that each of my sons was holding one of Tomio's hands.

I smiled: If the boys took a shine to Tomio, he was okay. It was that simple.

That night, I went to bed with an inner glow. Noriko and I had done the right thing.

**I**n the days remaining before Tomio commenced his first work away from the farm, the Ueki and Brent families combined efforts to prepare him: he was taken out for clothes, Mrs. Ueki tutored him in calligraphy and polite speech forms, and Ueki and I covered the rudiments of bank accounts. Tomio caught on quickly, and as a reward for his good-natured perseverance the inspector and I treated him to hamburgers and french fries on several occasions.

"When I am wealthy," he said with confidence, "I will eat such food every day." He made sure that Ueki and I knew we could be his guests whenever we desired.

Bright and early on the Monday, then, I took Tomio to the publishing firm of Kazutoshi Mizumoto. At the end of the day, when I picked him up, Tomio was beaming. "I got many subscriptions, Bulentü-san, and do you know why?" He didn't wait for me to ask. "By running, I stopped at so many houses that I will finish much of the territory I was given before the week is out. Mizumoto-san was too busy to thank me himself, but I know he will be glad."

Inspector Ueki's reservations evaporated during the next two months. "Not one shred of doubt remains in my mind," he grinned over a cup of green tea in my office one day before lunch. "The influence of your home has been exactly what Tomio needed."

"You're so right, Toshihiko," I concurred. "Tomio's already talking about getting an apartment, but Noriko won't hear of it. Wants him to build up a little nest egg first."

With that, I hit the intercom to see if Goto was ready for the lunch of charbroiled eel over buttered rice that I'd been thinking about all morning. While we were getting our jackets on, the telephone on my desk jangled. I answered, then held it out for the inspector. His expression forewarned me that



eating might be delayed—or canceled.

"I am rushing Mr. Brent to his home now," Ueki said, "and I want every available man on this!" He cut the connection. "Call Noriko, Sam, and tell her to get everyone inside and lock all the doors. It appears that Tomio Shioda has committed a felony, and he may decide to hide in familiar surroundings."

I was shocked, but did as he said.

Noriko refused to be shaken. "This has to be a mistake, husband. I will not turn my back on Tomio, and neither should you or Father."

It was no time for discussion or argument. If there was the slightest possibility of danger to my family . . .

"Let's go!" I said.

All of the more than half a million people who inhabit Okayama seemed to have converged on the city streets in their cars that day, and the whooping siren and flashing lights on Ueki's cruiser had a minimal effect on the solid lanes of traffic.

Inspector Ueki held the radio mike in one hand and steered with the other, cutting in and out of the gaps that opened up for us. From the constant stream of communications, I managed

to get a fairly complete picture of what had happened.

The publisher, Kazutoshi Mizumoto, had been found in his office by one of his clerks. Mizumoto, bleeding from multiple wounds, was barely conscious. He claimed an unspecified accident was the cause of his condition, but the clerk, acting on his own, called the police when Mizumoto passed out.

When officers arrived, they discovered that Mizumoto's office safe was open—and empty. They next discovered that one of the subscription salesmen had been seen hurrying from the company grounds clutching something in his hands.

That person was identified as Tomio Shioda.

The din in the streets faded as I sank into troubled reflection. One plus one added up to two in any computation, and if Tomio had been recognized as he fled from the site of a violent physical attack . . .

Was he just another person who reached out to grab whatever he wanted from life? If so, the quantum leap from hamburgers to more valuable stolen goods might make sense. I looked toward the north and the foothills of the Chugoku Mountain Range, hoping that his destination was somewhere

remote, far from Noriko, the boys, and Yumiko.

The entranceway door, when we got to the house, was shut. There was a jagged break in the frosted glass, next to the screw lock. Inside, a child was wailing.

Ueki pulled his revolver out. Cautiously, he tested the door, which slid on its tracks without resistance.

Tomio Shioda was directly in front of us standing in the central hallway with a teary-eyed Kenji in his arms. Ueki laid his weapon on the polished parquet and moved back. "We will not try to stop you, Shioda. Please do not harm the boy."

Kenji wiped his eyes with clenched hands and stared. Face ashen, Tomio Shioda put my son down and cowered in a corner.

My first impression was that Tomio was seconds away from crying; the second was that Noriko, now standing in the kitchen doorway with Yumiko and Jotaro behind her, was angry at her father—and me.

"Kenji was playing with rocks and broke the glass," she said. "He was scolded, and Tomio was trying to console him when . . . when you came in with that gun."

Inspector Ueki retrieved the weapon and, without taking his

eyes from Tomio, replaced it in his holster. "A serious crime has been committed, Tomio Shioda, and there is a good reason to suspect you."

"I am confused," Tomio stammered. "I brought the money here because I wanted you to tell me if what I was ordered to do by Mizumoto-san's editor was proper."

Ueki and I looked at each other.

"I'm going to call Goto," I said. "I've got a feeling I'm going to be late getting back to the office."

**F**ormal education and intelligence, from Sam Brent's perspective, are not necessarily the same. Tomio Shioda, I think, was proof of that. With nothing beyond an elementary school education, he still did know the difference between right and wrong, and when something didn't conform to what he'd been taught by his family and friends, Tomio was smart enough to go to someone who knew more than he about the ways of the world.

The peculiarities of this day, he said, began while he was sitting in the room used by the subscription solicitors to fill out the papers required by the circulation manager. Ordinarily, he told us, any number of peo-

ple would be there at a given time after completing their work in a designated sector, but Tomio finished his route early because of his speed and was alone when the manager beckoned him to his desk.

"Mr. Nakagawa wants someone familiar with the Willow District to come to his office. You have worked there, I believe."

"Yes," Tomio had confirmed. "I know it well. Who is Mr. Nakagawa, sir? I have not heard his name before."

The manager, an older man with a thin, hooked nose, had sniffed. "It is not seemly to ask questions about your superiors, young man. Ichiro Nakagawa is the one to tell you who he is and what he wants, not me."

Briefly Tomio thought the manager wanted to say more but changed his mind. Apologetically, he obtained directions and climbed the stairs to the second floor, then knocked politely at the open door of a room that was, in his eyes, larger than the farmhouse that used to be his home.

The man who had sent for someone who knew the Willow District was heavysset, with close-cropped hair and a pock-marked face. He was—he *said* he was—the new editor-in-chief of *Okayama Living*, selected by

Publisher Mizumoto because of his special talents. Yet, this Mr. Nakagawa did not have the gracious, refined speech that Mrs. Ueki had told him was appropriate for learned people, and he grinned constantly, no matter what he was saying.

Further, Nakagawa's wrists and the backs of his hands, poking far beyond the cuffs of an ill-fitting shirt, were covered with green, blue, and red dragons, and the tattoos showing above his collar to just below the chin depicted birds in flight above pink-blossomed cherry trees.

There were unpleasant splotches on his sleeves—stains that looked like blood.

While Tomio was taking all of this in, Nakagawa pushed a compact bundle across his desk. "Inside this brown paper," he had said with the same grin he had worn since Tomio met him, "is the sum of one million yen. It is a special prize being awarded by the magazine. You are to take it to Mr. Giichi Yamaguchi. His address is on the wrapping." Nakagawa stared at Tomio. "Do not think for a moment," he continued, "of keeping this for yourself. That would be . . . unfortunate."

Tomio, face burning, afraid to ask questions, said he would never do such a thing. Naka-

gawa nodded curtly, gave Tomio a copy of the first issue of the magazine, and told him to take it to the man who won the prize.

Inspector Ueki poured another cup of tea. "What happened next, Master Shioda?"

Tomio gestured at the mound of unwrapped money on one corner of the kitchen table. "I left as quickly as I could and came straight here."

"Sam, Father," Noriko said, slicing onions and green peppers for the omelet that would be our lunch, "I think you should look at the magazine. It is at the bottom of the futon closet in the downstairs bedroom, and it is *not* what Mizumoto-san said it would be."

Puzzled, I went to the closet and fetched Volume One, Number One of *Okayama Living*.

Coming up with the right adjectives to describe it wasn't easy, but the inspector and I settled on tawdry, cheap, and sleazy. It was filled with photographs of painted, topless, and provocatively posed women, and the stories ranged from confessions of outlandish behavior to bizarre fantasies.

"A better name would be *Okayama Loving*," I commented as Noriko put the omelet in a skillet. "But what does it have to do with a million in

prize money, an editor, a beating, and an empty safe?"

Inspector Ueki was carefully studying the gatefold.

"Really, Toshihiko," I quipped, "this is no time for dwelling on a distorted concept of pulchritude."

"Did you ever study anatomy in college, Sam?" he asked.

I said I hadn't.

"Neither did I, but the human navel, as far as I know, does not come with numerals directly below it."

"Let me see that." I took the magazine and scanned the umbilical area of the wickedly smiling model. The most substantial aspect of her attire was a pair of tight red shorts, with her upper torso indifferently concealed by a peekaboo blouse, sheer, unbuttoned, and knotted in a saucy bow at the midriff. Directly below her navel were three numbers, printed so lightly in blue that they might have been overlooked.

"Okay," I said, "so she's been inked in a weird place. Is there some kind of deep significance to that?"

Inspector Ueki turned the magazine face down on the table. "At the moment, I do not know what to think." He smiled as Noriko sat down and started dividing the omelet into individual servings. "Let us take

time to enjoy Noriko's masterpiece and continue our deliberations afterward."

Tomio Shioda was the first to put his chopsticks down. "What will you do with all this money Mr. Nakagawa gave me?"

Inspector Ueki regarded the million yen thoughtfully. "Master Shioda, I am going to ask you to follow Nakagawa's instructions as soon as I make certain arrangements."

"Arrangements?" I eyed the empty platter wistfully.

"I am going to send my men to that address in the Willow District," Ueki said, "and when the money is passed over they will take pictures. After that, if Master Shioda doesn't mind doing me a favor, I am going to request that he remain at the publishing firm to look around when it closes for the day."

"*Hai*, of course, inspector," Tomio said, getting up to help Noriko and me clear away the dishes. "May I ask why you want photographs of the person receiving the million yen?"

Ueki manipulated valves and turned on the gas heater that provided hot water for the kitchen sink. "I may be in error, but from what Master Shioda said, this Nakagawa sounds less like an editor than one of the *yakuza* gangsters who affect tattoos, and an empty safe

was found in Mizumoto's office. I would like to know if it once held the million yen here on the table. If the person for whom the money is intended, Giichi Yamaguchi, is identified as a hoodlum from the photographs we take, we may establish a criminal relationship. Therefore, Master Shioda, I also will want you to look at our files of known undesirables to see if Nakagawa is among them."

"Seems like a good starting point to me," I said, "but I don't get what you expect Tomio to find after work."

The inspector shrugged. "I am not sure, either, Sam, but I want Master Shioda to go through the offices. If there is anything suspicious, I can instigate an official search."

Tomio Shioda started to gather up the money. "It will take me an hour to run to the Willow District. Should I go by bus?"

"No," Ueki said. "This way, I will have ample time to send officers in plain clothes to the scene. I will meet you once the cash has been conveyed so you can inspect the police photos, and then we will discuss what you are to do tonight."

Tomio waited while Noriko rewrapped the packet, then departed by way of the kitchen door.

"If you are ready, Sam," the inspector said, "I will take you to your office on my way to headquarters. If possible, I will keep you apprised of our progress and Mizumoto's medical status."

I put an arm around Noriko's shoulders and hugged her. "Okay. Goto and I have a lot of union business to talk over, so I'll probably be there all afternoon."

A glazier was fitting a new sheet of glass into the door as we stepped down from the entranceway. I was so relieved that Tomio was no longer a suspect in a brutal beating and an apparent robbery that I didn't bother to sulk about the price tag for Kenji's antics.

Nonetheless, as we merged into the traffic on the thoroughfare fronting the river by our house, I began to speculate on whether there might be potential danger for the young man who loved running and eating hamburgers. Suppose Ichiro Nakagawa really was a crook and someone caught Tomio snooping around after hours? But surely, an editor—if he was an editor—wouldn't be a sinister creep from the underworld. Would he?

I peered at Ueki. No. No need to get uptight. The inspector would see that Tomio got all of

the protection he needed. I could count on that.

I sat back and watched a honking duel between a trucker and a cab driver who wanted to change lanes. Near a branch post office, Tomio Shioda was going down the sidewalk like the proverbial bat, drawing curious glances from slower pedestrians.

The rest of my work day was spent with Masahige Goto, ironing out the fine points of complying with a union request. Its members—all of my employees—wanted a place for morning calisthenics, company uniforms, a company song, and a period for meditation before getting down to the daily grind.

This called for some effort—and expense. Space, at least, was available. With a new warehouse just recently opened, we had most of the area formerly used to store equipment. I would, however, have to shell out for the uniforms, dearly loved by so many Japanese company types, and we were going to have to pay someone to put together a patriotic and musical composition about the joys of working with Sam Brent in the computer hardware game.

I wasn't griping. Instead of

viewing management as a natural foe, our union made invaluable contributions. The suggestion box wasn't a wastebasket in disguise. Several times a year, various union members came up with solid ideas on engineering, sales, or service improvement that resulted in higher profits. There were no individual rewards. Following Japanese custom, everyone benefited, taking an equal slice of the blanket wage boosts.

The only complaint I could muster was that I'd be expected to participate in the exercises, lead the song, and take part in the meditation.

"I'm slim and trim," I told Goto, "I can't carry a tune, and meditation puts me to sleep."

Goto vetoed my objections with a smile and the snap of a sleeve garter. "We Japanese expect such activities, Bulentusan, and everyone would be delighted—and work harder—if you agreed to this."

"Okay, all right," I smiled. "Tell them we'll get the show on the road as soon as possible."

Goto was rubbing his hands together contentedly when Inspector Ueki appeared at the door, propping himself against the jamb. "I would guess from Goto-san's expression that he has just been granted another pay increase."

"One more raise," Goto said as he eased by the inspector on his way to confer with union officials, "and I would be able to afford a new pair of shoes."

"He makes almost as much as I do," I retorted.

Ueki took a seat on the sofa. "Are you caught up for the day?"

The electric clock indicated another thirty minutes before my normal departure time, but there wasn't anything important left on my schedule. "Yeah, I'm in shape to take a breather. How's Mizumoto, and what'd you find out when Tomio delivered the money?"

Ueki took out a fresh pack of cigarettes. "I have experienced a policeman's dream come true. All of the facts—crime, motive, method, and persons responsible—are in my hands. One more bit of evidence, and I will make the arrests in this case of the numbered navel."

"My ears are all yours," I said, putting my feet up on the desk.

Kazutoshi Mizumoto, Ueki said, had undergone surgery for his injuries and came out of anesthesia not long after Tomio completed his appointment in the Willow District. The publisher asked for Ueki by name, and when the inspector arrived at the hospital, Mizumoto disclosed everything.



The attack on Mizumoto (Ueki said) was the final episode in a series of escalating financial problems. His firm had been on the verge of bankruptcy due to poor management, and Mizumoto, failing in his attempts to get bank refinancing, turned to a loan shark—Ichiro Nakagawa. He asked for, and received, twenty million yen, to be repaid at a hundred percent interest. Mizumoto was banking on the new magazine for a quick recovery and an end to the debt, but the constant cost overruns and production delays put him in the position of having to repay the money before he was prepared.

Nakagawa lost no time in letting Mizumoto know that he was the head of a powerful gang, and was not to be affronted by failure to make payments. He gave Mizumoto an ultimatum: either name him editor-in-chief to supervise all operations, including a lottery, or Nakagawa would take over.

"There are no risks," Nakagawa had said, "and as soon as I have recovered what is owed, you will once again be in charge. We will run the numbers pool for a limited time only, so those who frown on such enterprises will never know about it."

Unable to see an alternative, Mizumoto capitulated, and

Nakagawa was soon joined in his scheme by Giichi Yamaguchi, one of his lieutenants, who made occasional and unobtrusive visits to the publishing offices.

Their first move was to change the scheduled format for *Oka-yama Living* to something verging on the pornographic, laughing off Mizumoto's protests. Then, well before the magazine's debut, they sent out letters asking subscribers to donate to what they claimed was a fund for war veterans.

Each month, the letters promised, one donor would be eligible to receive a million yen as a reward for civic charity. The money could be claimed by any contributing subscriber who matched the last three digits on his address label with the number that would be printed on the centerfold model's midsection every issue.

"Some of the fools will object to the unexpectedly spicy contents," Nakagawa had sneered, "but natural greed will make my organization much wealthier. More and more people will subscribe and donate once they hear they can win money just by looking at a woman's abdomen."

Mizumoto was convinced that he was helpless, that there was no way he could bring a halt to

what the gangsters were doing without subjecting himself to arrest or disgrace.

The publisher had a breaking point, however, which came when he discovered that Nakagawa had rigged the first lottery payoff by using a number with no corresponding subscriber. Yamaguchi was declared the winner by default. Nakagawa insisted that Mizumoto put up the money himself from the dwindling supply of capital in his safe. "Yamaguchi does not subscribe, but he is very deserving," Nakagawa had laughed.

Mizumoto threatened to call in the authorities despite the consequences. He had gone as far as dialing the number when Nakagawa tore into him, breaking Mizumoto's arm and several ribs. Nakagawa then smashed a priceless vase and slashed away with a razor-sharp fragment.

Mizumoto could stand no more; he gave up the combination to the safe and swore to say nothing. Nakagawa showed his appreciation with a kick to the publisher's head.

"I will be elsewhere for a few days," Nakagawa had leered, "and you will continue as if nothing had happened. One word of this to anyone, and you will die—painfully."

The inspector had put his notebook away when a nurse came in to give Mizumoto an injection. "You should be thankful you were not killed. You must have been still lying on the floor more dead than alive when Nakagawa told Tomio to take the money to Yamaguchi. I am certain that Nakagawa wanted to add to his sense of importance by having a 'lesser' person—a messenger—handle the cash from there on. Or, perhaps, he was afraid to be seen in Yamaguchi's presence so soon after his outrageous actions."

"I still shudder at his ruthlessness," said Mizumoto.

Inspector Ueki tapped his incisors with a thumbnail. "You were wrong in going to Nakagawa for an illicit loan in the first place, but it required courage for you to tell me these things under the threat of death. I will have my men watch over you until we arrest Nakagawa."

"I am sorry that anyone suspected Tomio was a thief," Mizumoto said. "He must have been seen running with the parcel Nakagawa prepared not long before the police and ambulance came. It was natural for someone to link his rapid departure with the open safe."

Inspector Ueki had gotten up

to leave. "Incidentally, why did you offer the sales appointment to Tomio when Sam Brent and I came to see him? Was it altruism, or did it amuse you to drag Master Shioda into a criminal operation while a policeman was present?"

"No, please believe me," Mizumoto had pleaded. "Tomio is a born salesman, and I wanted as many subscriptions as possible to make the magazine succeed so I could rid myself of Nakagawa. Tomio was hired when I still thought I could repay the loan—before the lottery and altered format were forced upon me."

Leaning forward on the sofa to shake a cigarette from its pack, Ueki forecast rapid confinement in a cell for Nakagawa and his associate.

"Good going!" I said. "Did you come up with a positive identification from the pictures your men took? Any prior arrests for Yamaguchi?"

"Hai." Ueki flicked the wheel on his butane lighter. "His photographs are on file with the Japanese National Police. Yamaguchi was part of a gang in Kobe for many years and apparently was run out of town by his boss for bungling an assassination attempt. As for Nakagawa, Tomio found *his* ugly face in our Okayama records.

He has been arrested here twice in the past few years on charges of usury and gambling, but there was insufficient evidence to convict. Two years ago, it seems, he began his own gang, but we are unsure of its extent yet."

I lowered my feet; one of them had no feeling. "So far, so good," I said, stomping until the numbness turned to a tingle. "I guess Tomio's gone back to the publisher's place like you asked, but I'm still at sea about what you want him to look for."

Ueki stood up with a smile like a Lewis Carroll cat. "Directness is as much a virtue as thrift, Sam. All I really need now is proof that the letters seeking fraudulent contributions were, in fact, mailed. And where else, Sam, would you expect to find a list of subscribers to *Okayama Living*? Armed with only a few names copied from such a list—possibly a computer printout—we can undertake an immediate interrogation of the letter's recipients. Following that, a search warrant will be justified, and I am certain that Nakagawa will have records of receipts from the lottery. He will not escape conviction again, Sam."

I thought of something. "For a cop, you surprise me. You could put the cuffs on Naka-

gawa now for beating and robbery. Heck, you've got proof the money was delivered."

The inspector gazed at me sympathetically. "What transpired in Mizumoto's office, Sam, is a matter of one man's word against another's, and there is no proof of the source of the money that Yamaguchi received. This way, I will have Nakagawa on charges of conducting a numbers racket with Yamaguchi."

The rising decibel level from the street signaled the start of the late afternoon rush hour. "You're going to make sure Tomio doesn't get in some kind of jam, aren't you?"

Ueki crushed his cigarette out in a glass ashtray. "Master Shioda will not look for the list of subscribers until everyone else is gone. It will be dark by then, and I intend to be outside myself although I anticipate absolutely no difficulties."

"Want some company? I don't want you to get bored and fall asleep."

Ueki smiled. "As usual, Sam, I cannot involve you officially. But, if my son-in-law goes for a ride with me in my personal car, who is to complain?"

"Pick me up after dinner?"

"I have a superior idea."

"Such as?"

"Hanako and I will invite

ourselves to eat with you. Noriko said something about having sauteed prawns for the evening repast."

I made a crack about intending to keep the menu hidden from my in-laws in the future and we walked out to the elevators.

There are occasions when one can see in the night sky a diffuse and faint light that appears to be opposite the sun. The Germans call this phenomenon *gegen-schein*, a word which has been taken into English, and scientists believe it may be caused by the reflection of sunlight in atmospheric dust.

Whatever the explanation, the *gegen-schein* was visible on the night Ueki and I waited by his car near Mizumoto Publications, Ltd. Against the ghostly illumination, the building appeared as an L-shaped silhouette. The taller structure housed the editorial, circulation, art, and advertising offices, and the other contained the presses and facilities for storage and loading the trucks that distributed the various magazines.

We were parked to one side of a service station along Route 53, not far from the Sasagase River and about sixty meters from the firm's driveway. By

nine o'clock, I was nervous. "What's keeping Tomio so long?"

Inspector Ueki shielded his lighter with a cupped hand and touched a cigarette to the flame. "The last car in the parking lot pulled out only a short time ago, Sam. I imagine that Master Shioda has bided his time, making sure no one is left inside."

Ueki smoked, I worried. An hour later, he was uneasy, too. "He should have been out by now, Sam. I am going to investigate."

We crossed the highway and walked toward the main entrance. The doors were locked. Following rows of shrubbery, we went around to the back. Everything there also was firmly bolted.

"Let's try the loading area," I said. "We might find a service entrance we can use."

The loading space, lit by a dim incandescent bulb in a wire basket, was deserted. We climbed a gently sloping ramp to a concrete platform. Evenly spaced along its length were four wide metal overhead doors. Squatting down, I tugged at the handles of each. Nothing.

"Break a window," I urged. "You're a cop, and Tomio ... hey!"

One of the doors was rolling up with a thunderous clatter,

flooding us in the white glare of fluorescent lighting. Tomio Shioda rushed out. "I heard you talking," he said. "Come inside, and see what is here!"

"Ah, you found the lists," Ueki said.

"Hai," replied Tomio, "but then I wanted to see if there was anything else that would help you. Hurry, please!"

I took a look at the immediate interior. The length of one wall was taken up by high-speed presses, and bales of magazines were flanked by several bright red forklifts. I didn't see what there was to cause Tomio so much excitement.

"In there," he said, nodding at a corrugated steel wall partition. There was one door, unlocked. Tomio opened it, and Ueki and I went through.

"My God!" I said.

Ueki sucked his breath in over his teeth in a hiss of astonishment. "Weapons!" he whispered in a classic understatement.

Laid out on long plank tables were revolvers of all makes and calibers, pistols, and semi-automatic rifles.

"How many guns, Sam?" the inspector said in a hoarse voice.

His inner turmoil was understandable. The inspector had told me once that the average Japanese policeman *never* has

to deal with forbidden handguns or rifles in the possession of ordinary citizens, and that the major focus for these items was the teeming cities where organized criminals used them in campaigns of internecine warfare and terror. For Ueki to uncover a small arsenal in his own city . . .

The inspector and I began a hurried count. "About eighty," I said.

Ueki sucked his breath in again. "*Hai*. And what is that?" He nudged three stout crates under the table with his foot. They bore a stenciled advisory to the effect that the contents were U.S. government property.

"More weapons, Toshihiko. I'd bet on it."

Ueki walked around, found a crowbar, and pried open a lid, exposing dozens of fragmentation hand grenades. "Did anyone see you?" he asked Tomio tensely.

"I do not think so," the young man answered.

The inspector touched the stock of one of the rifles. "Let us hope not. The people responsible for this are not likely to leave their cache unguarded for long, and I have no way of estimating their numbers. Turn off the lights, Master Shioda. My portable radio is in the car,

and we will stand by until reinforcements are here."

Back by the loading platform, I tugged the overhead door, which rumbled down with a deafening racket. "Can't unlock it from the outside," I complained after fumbling around for several seconds.

"Never mind that," Ueki said. "Our first priority . . ."

We spun about at the sound of fast-approaching vehicles and were caught in the concentrated headlights of six cars and a van. Doors swung open, and we were surrounded by men—many men who were aiming guns at us.

Instinctively, we raised our hands and pressed our backs against the door I had just shut.

"Please understand," Ueki said softly, "that I could not risk drawing my own weapon with the two of you in the line of fire."

Then we were hustled inside. "Stand over there by the presses," a man commanded.

The abundance of tattoos was all the identification I needed.

It was Ichiro Nakagawa.

**T**o most of us blessed by health, vigor, and safe occupations, I think, death is a philosophical abstraction, automatically rejected as something too distant

to rate serious consideration, or an event that closes in on others, not ourselves. But to face the end with no time for preparation, as we did that night, can be a tearing and rending of the comforting cloak of daily goals and hopes in which we wrap ourselves.

Facing us was a man who was to be the instrument of our destruction. Everything about him, from the anticipatory body posture and the cynical set of the muscles around his mouth to the dark void of his eyes, suggested that killing human beings, for him, would be on the same order as uprooting a weed.

The name of our appointed executioner was Giichi Yamaguchi, a slow-witted giant of a man Nakagawa apparently valued for his unhesitating loyalty. When Yamaguchi was first assigned to watch us until Nakagawa gave the final order, he did it with a long, broad-bladed butcher knife. I was fostering vague hopes of overpowering him with Ueki's aid when Nakagawa came sauntering over with a revolver from the stockpile.

"Take the gun, Giichi," he directed his minion, "and load it with bullets from this box. It is time you learned the thrill of shooting enemies."

As Yamaguchi clumsily

obeyed, Nakagawa kept us covered with his pistol, chatting nonchalantly. He boasted of his plans to make his *yakuza* group the strongest in Japan, armed to the teeth, prepared to launch strikes on rivals in Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, and eventually Tokyo itself.

Inspector Ueki, sounding resigned to the dictates of fate, asked several questions which, in better circumstances, I would have called trivial.

"How long have you had all these guns?" Ueki said.

Nakagawa's response was that his gang had been gathering them for more than a year, traveling in great secrecy to the major cities, buying one weapon at a time if that was all that could be obtained, stashing them with individual henchmen. Then, two days ago, Nakagawa had made a grand score from a smuggling ring, using every yen he had been able to milk from the lottery and other money accumulated from drugs, prostitution, and gambling. And while his campaign strategy was receiving its final touches, Nakagawa went on, the weapons were secreted at Mizumoto's publishing firm.

"Ingenious, was it not?" he chuckled. "I am in total control here, and it was easy to arrange



for no one to be around last night when we brought in the weapons. My associates posed as repairmen today and kept people away from our storage area. And," he continued, "our task was simplified by the confusion caused by all the cops milling around in the other building after I gave that fool of a publisher some lumps. Everyone wanted to go over there and see what was happening. Of course I made myself scarce until everything calmed down."

Inspector Ueki appeared to be impressed. "Brilliant. Yet I am perplexed by the fact that no one was here tonight to guard your supplies. And it seems that someone forgot to lock the door to the weapons room."

"I am the one who left it unlocked," Nakagawa said. "I came in after the offices were closed to make sure all was well, but we left in a hurry to collect the guns that were still located elsewhere in Okayama. Catching you makes up for my oversight."

Nakagawa reached into Ueki's jacket pocket and removed his service revolver, his police I.D., and the names Tomio had copied from the list of subscribers. "It was so kind of you," he said, "to warn me that

a well-known cop was on my trail, and then to offer that you and your friends would remain silent—forever."

I rushed in to make some more contributions to the stalling. "The grenades—they were stolen from an American military base. And I know something else, too. Mizumoto's never going to get out of debt, not with your kind of interest rates. He's going to be working for you until you get tired of him, right?"

Nakagawa's eyes seemed to linger on my red hair. "You are clever—for a foreigner."

Tomio Shioda glowered at Nakagawa. "You will be punished! I know you will!"

Nakagawa's grin appeared to gain in intensity. "It means nothing to get rid of a mere stripling, but the death of an American and a cop who has persecuted so many of my friends is another matter. I will make sure that everyone knows who is responsible, and no one will ever dare challenge my power. Now, I must oversee the loading of our treasure. When we are through—so are you."

I could see that most of the handguns were already in the van, which had backed up the ramp to the loading platform. The remaining rifles and grenades, placed nearby, would not take long.

Inspector Ueki also was surveying the activity. While Nakagawa and his followers were outside, Ueki whispered something to Tomio and laughed, instantly drawing Yamaguchi's wrath.

"Hey, cop," he growled, "when I put a bullet through you, you will not think anything is funny!"

"A policeman must always be ready to die," Ueki retorted disdainfully. "What I find amusing is that you are so stupid that you have forgotten to release the safety catch on your revolver."

Yamaguchi glanced down and jerked his thumb back and forth by the trigger guard. In that instant, Tomio sprang to his feet and bowled into the mobster, knocking him onto his back. Ueki, in another lightning motion, secured the gun and used the butt to knock Yamaguchi out.

"Into the main building!" Ueki said. "In here we are trapped!"

We dashed toward a narrow corridor that angled away sharply from the presses, but Nakagawa was out of the van, shooting.

"Stop them!" he bellowed.

More men scrambled out, bringing weapons to bear. Ueki snapped off three rounds from Yamaguchi's revolver, sending

two of them sprawling; then, as the others took cover, he scooped a grenade from the crate that had been opened.

"Run!" the inspector shouted. He pulled the pin, tossing the live grenade on top of the others as we turned the corner.

Incoherent thoughts. A desperate stride equals what? One meter? Two?

Crack of gunfire, whine of ricochets, then . . .

. . . bursts of white light, roar of gases expanding at incredible speed, rain of metal and wood and glass even before the sound finally ends.

I was on the floor. Someone—Tomio—helped me up.

Ueki got to his feet, looked back.

The inferno behind us was spreading, coming our way.

Dazed, we stumbled to the front exit, kicked out the glass, and went to Ueki's car. He sent out an urgent call for help, but when the fire engines and squad cars came speeding down the highway in a convoy of wailing sirens and frenzied lights, there was little remaining of Mizumoto Publications, Ltd.—or of Nakagawa and his gang.

"I would not want to do that again," Tomio said simply once we were safely back at home.

He wasn't alone in that sentiment.

There came a splendid summer day in that same year when, once more, Inspector Ueki, Masahige Goto, and I went to the park for a picnic lunch of burgers and fries. Under the shadow of a peach tree, a few paces from the pond by the waterfall where the carp still swam in plump majesty, we spread paper napkins and set to with hearty appetites.

It was a day when the sun, the balance, and the harmony of our individual selves seemed to mesh, to blend into a pervasive oneness of contentment.

Watching a young couple stroll hand in hand past beds of pink and white begonias, I let casual thoughts of the recent past drift lazily across my mind. Among them was the recollection of a newspaper photograph of the publisher, Kazutoshi Mizumoto, moon face dolorous and penitent after receiving a light sentence for his involvement with Nakagawa.

"I will make amends for what I have done," he had told reporters, "and will dedicate the rest of my life to publishing stories that give people motivation to live decently."

I believed him.

Looking over at Inspector Ueki's serene countenance, I felt another surge of vicarious

pride in his successful collaboration with the Japanese National Police in cracking the ring that was smuggling most of the weapons into Japan at the time.

And as Goto caught my eye, smiling, I guessed that he was thinking of the unsophisticated farm lad we had met on this very spot in such an unorthodox way—and with such surprising consequences.

With Mizumoto Publications in ashes, that youth, Tomio Shioda, was out of work until Goto came up with a solution that everyone cheered—putting Tomio in charge of our company calisthenics program. His enthusiasm was catching, and with my total blessing, we now had the best of gym equipment and outfits for our frequent track and field competitions with other firms and with a local athletic club.

Tomio, in short, was making a valuable contribution to our team spirit and earning a decent living. He was to join us for the day's outing if he got out of a meeting early enough.

Inspector Ueki, I saw, was now watching me. "It appears that you are doing some pleasant cerebration, Sam."

I disposed of the last french fry. "I was considering how lucky we are. You know, I be-

lieve I overlooked patting you on the back for distracting Yamaguchi when you told him he'd forgotten to release the safety catch on his gun. Of course, you'd have had time to take him anyway when he tried to shoot us, but every little bit helps."

Ueki coughed discreetly and beamed at the group of kindergarten children shouting with delight as they followed their teacher over one of the park trails. "Distracting him was, indeed, my objective, Sam, so Tomio could put his natural swiftness to work. It was, I admit, a first-rate bluff."

"Darned right it was!" I said before the implications sank in. What bluff? What was Ueki talking about? Had that safety really been off all the time?

"Yes," the inspector continued, "I will take credit for the little ruse. Yamaguchi was so clumsy in handling a gun that I reasoned he didn't know almost no revolvers have effective mechanisms to prevent accidental firing. As you know, Sam, safety catches are found only on pistols and on most modern rifles and shotguns."

A lump of fried potato seemed to be sticking in my throat: "Yeah, right. That's obvious to me." I neglected to add the "now."

Goto spoke, his voice filled with respect. "Ah, yes, that was a clever gamble, Inspector Ueki. From what Bulentu-san has said of the incident, any chance was better than none at all."

"None," I repeated absently. I'd been more cheerful about our escape than I'd had a right to be. If I were honest with myself, I'd confess that I'd gotten a lot of consolation from persuading myself that we were never that close to the grave—that even if Yamaguchi had pulled the trigger, the gun wouldn't have fired.

But why dwell on it? We were alive and together on a clear, beautiful day, and I foresaw no major hassles on the horizon. I heard someone hailing us and looked around. Just beyond the miniature waterfall, white-sneakered feet pounding down on the rounded pebbles of the path, Tomio Shioda was running toward us, a large white paper bag in his hand.

"More hamburgers," he said, coming to a graceful stop. "I am sorry to be so late, but there was much to do in completing the arrangements for our next track meet with the Prefecture Sports Club." He held out the sack. "These are for you. Cakes and tea were served at our meeting, and I am not hungry."

Inspector Ueki patted his lean

stomach. "Would you be offended if I declined? Overeating makes me dull, and I have many cases awaiting my attention."

"I, too, have had more than enough," Goto said, "but I thank you for your generosity."

I suppose my natural response was delayed a second too long because Tomio moved away in the direction of the pool. He crumbled some of the hamburgers and threw the pieces to one side, then put the others in the water.

I understood. In a land where the responsibilities of country, company, family, and friends are sacred, all debts are repaid. One does not take—does not receive—without returning in equal coin or spirit.

Tomio had come here in the spring for food intended for the birds and fish of the park. Now he was giving it back. He had made the same gesture toward us, and the scales were balanced.

Inspector Ueki walked up to Tomio. "When I first saw you, you were still a boy, *Mister*

Shioda. You have come far in a short time, and are showing the good judgment that goes with maturity."

"*Hai*, Shioda-san," Goto said. "You are a man, and we are proud of you."

Tomio's raspberry birthmark stood out in a deep blush. "Being a man is not enough. I also wish to be properly grateful, and that is why I held this back for my employer." He gave me one of the burgers. "You are so fond of these, Brent-san, that I think you would like one more."

There was no doubt, no hesitation, then, as to what I should do. Each of us was bound, one to the other, by friendship old and new. With the simple certainty that the bonds of trust and gratitude are more enduring and meaningful when shared fully, I took the last of Tomio's offering, divided it into four pieces, and scattered them by the water.

"A little something from each of us," I said.

They nodded their understanding, and, smiling, we returned to work.

# UNSOLVED

by George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the May issue.

Hubert was one of a group of men hired by a jewelry company as early-morning watchmen.

1. For no more than one hundred days Hubert was on a rotating system of standing watch.
2. Hubert's first and last watches were the only ones of his to occur on a Sunday.
3. Hubert's first and last watches occurred on the same date of different months.
4. The months in which Hubert's first and last watches occurred had the same number of days.

*In which one of the twelve months did Hubert have his first watch?*

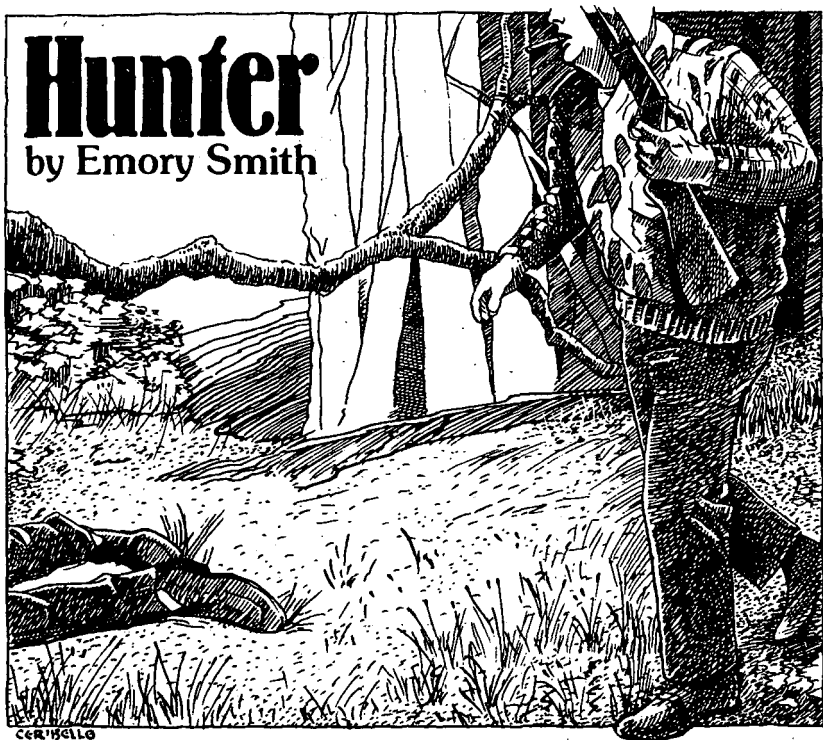
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See page 145 for the solution to the March puzzle.

*"Hubert's First Watch," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction by George J. Summers. Copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers. Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.*

# Hunter

by Emory Smith



**P**aul Everett checked the safety on his .30 caliber rifle, grasped it by the strap, leaned over and lowered it carefully until he could rest it upright against the trunk of the giant water oak. He moved painfully from his cramped perch and scrambled down. He almost fell when he gained the ground, his thighs and knees aching from over three hours in the tree. He walked in place and flexed his arms to restore circulation. He had bagged two

bucks from that limb in the past but wasn't destined to add another to the tally today. No matter, it was still early in the season.

Paul never heard the shot that smashed into his chest and hurled him backward against the tree. He was only aware of the sharp crack of his skull against the trunk. The blow to his chest was too powerful to associate with any pain he had experienced before. He lay at the foot of the tree, his head



supported against the trunk. There was a numb throb in his chest and left shoulder, but the back of his head hurt more. He took a deep breath, and as his lungs filled, an excruciating pain shot through his chest. He passed out.

He felt something tugging at him but was unable to shake himself fully awake. He opened his eyes and fought to focus. The fumbling at his clothing continued. The world spun about and he felt as though he were falling. He brought the scene into focus at last and saw a man hovering over him, naked from the waist up, paunchy, middle-aged, with a pale, hairless chest.

"You've come to; thank God," the man said. "I think I have the bleeding stopped. I put my undershirt over the exit wound and a couple of handkerchiefs over the entrance wound in front. I used your belt to hold them, so try not to move because they might fall out. As soon as I get you buttoned up, I'll run for help. There's a phone booth on the highway about six miles back. I'm parked a mile and a half from here, I'll have somebody here to help you as quickly as I can. Do you know the closest place where there would be a doctor and an ambulance?"

Paul opened his mouth to speak, but only a hoarse croak came out. He couldn't think of

the answer anyway. He knew the area well, but his mind was a blank when he tried to think of the name of the nearby town.

"Doesn't matter, the operator can tell me," the man said. He finished rebuttoning Paul's hunting jacket and stood and began to put his own shirt back on. He shivered in the brisk fall air. "I'm really sorry, fellow. When I came through those bushes and saw you lying there, I almost fainted. Where the hell did you come from? I was in that spot for an hour and I swear nobody came into this area during that time. Then I heard leaves rattling and caught just a glimpse of movement. Damn! I should have waited for a better look. It never even crossed my mind anybody else was in here today."

He tucked his shirttails into his pants and rebuckled his belt. He picked up the hunting jacket he had dropped on the ground and spread it over Paul. Paul tried again to speak and managed to croak, "How bad?"

"I just don't know. It's on the left side but sure as hell missed the heart or you would be gone. You didn't bleed very much."

At that moment the dull throb became a sharp, penetrating pain, and Paul cried out. A wave of heat passed over his body and he could feel the sweat on his face. The intensity of the pain subsided, and he felt the

cold wind on his damp face and head.

"I'm going now. You hang in there; it won't be long," the man said, patting Paul lightly on the right shoulder.

"Wait," Paul gasped. His mouth was extremely dry. "Thirsty."

"I'm sorry, I don't have any water."

"My bag," Paul said.

The man picked up Paul's canvas satchel containing his lunch and canteen. He held Paul up and let him take a few sips of the water. He emptied the satchel and folded it and slipped it under Paul's head as a pillow and left the little clearing at a trot.

Paul lay on the forest floor in a semi-daze. His face and one hand, which had fallen from under the stranger's jacket, were cold in the wind. A pale autumn sun broke through the clouds occasionally but offered little warmth. The pain, which now covered his entire body above the waist, was a dull back-ground. Twice the dull hurt surged to almost unbearable intensity and then receded and left Paul sweat-soaked and trembling. Each time after an eternity of shivering cold he slept or passed out for a while. He was coming out of the second of these periods when the hunter emerged from the underbrush. He walked over to

Paul and stood looking at him for a moment.

"How you doing?"

Paul tried to speak, but his throat was too dry. The man picked up the canteen and slipped his arm behind Paul to raise him to drink. He eased him back to the ground, screwed the plastic cap back on the canteen, and set it down.

"If prayer heals, you ought to be up and around by now. I doubt anybody ever prayed more fervently than I did for you. 'Don't let him die. Please God, don't let him die.' Over and over while I was running back to the truck. I got to thinking about what it would mean if you died. I have been thinking hard for the last hour. I guess I don't do much thinking ordinarily, but something like this jars you out of your rut."

He settled heavily to the ground facing Paul. His fleshy face was flushed. He continued. "I guess that's just what it is: a rut. I work, go home or to the club, sleep, play golf on Saturday, go to church on Sunday morning and watch a ball game in the afternoon. Just kind of let things go their way. But today I have been really thinking. I have been thinking that if you die I'll be charged with manslaughter. I could even go to jail. I don't think I would; I don't have a criminal record, and I'm what you might call a

model citizen. But I could. You know what goes on in jails these days. Man, I am the overweight version of the ninety-eight pound weakling. I couldn't fight my way out of the well known damp paper bag. I would be the tough guys' meat." He shivered.

He stared at Paul for several seconds in silence. "But I don't think I would ever actually go to jail. I'll tell you, things are at a critical point for me at work right now. My boss will retire in two years, and it's about time for the company to decide who will step into the job. It's a damn good job, vice-presidential level. That means upwards of a hundred grand a year and stock options and the whole bit. I'm not doing badly now but nothing in that league. There are three of us in the running, but to tell you the truth, I wouldn't trade places with either of the others. The old man will have to decide in the next few months. It'll be a tough decision and he would like nothing better than an excuse to eliminate one of us just to simplify matters. I can hear him now: 'Terry has too much on him at the moment to be trying to get on top of a new job, what with this manslaughter business.'"

He jumped up and pranced around, hugging himself with his arms. "Damn, it's cold out

here." He began to pace rapidly, only a few steps in each direction, then pivoting swiftly and starting back. The fiercest wave of pain yet swept over Paul and he was no longer able to follow the man's words. The spasm subsided, leaving him hopelessly weak. His entire body felt damp. The man was still talking. Paul opened his eyes and saw that he still paced the little clearing.

"... seemed funny at first. Peggy and I used to laugh at the idea of people like us belonging to a country club. But over the years it's become more and more important to us. We spend a lot of time there, and so do the kids. Hell, they practically live there during the summer. Now it's our whole social life, all our friends are there. Of course, there's church and the Rotary, but those are nothing in comparison to the club. Two groups, factions I guess you would call them, have grown up at the club over the last few years. It's unfortunate really, and kind of childish, but they have, and I'm what you might call a leader of one of the factions. There's an election for the board of directors coming up in a couple of weeks, and my faction has a chance to get control once and for all. It'll be a close thing, though, and there are some fence-sitters. If I were hauled off on a manslaughter

charge, it just might blow us right out of the water. I know it sounds silly to be talking about something like that right now, but dammit, it's not silly. That club is an important . . ."

A roaring in Paul's ears drowned out the words. The limbs of the oak over his head began to spin, and he slipped into unconsciousness again. As he came out of it, the drone continued.

" . . . have to go to some second-rate diploma mill in the state university system. She's got what it takes to make it in the best school in the country, and with that promotion we could send her. Terry Junior, is not as sharp, but he could still do better than Local U. If we can just afford it."

Paul remained conscious but lost track of the words. When would help arrive? How long would it take them to reach him? He remembered the name of the town now, the nearest place large enough to have a hospital. Stupid to have forgotten, he stayed in a motel there every hunting season. Stupid to have forgotten—to have forgotten that name, what was it? Damn, it had slipped away again. He opened his eyes. The man had sat down again and rested his elbows on his thighs and his head in his palms.

" . . . one dumb mistake. I know I should have waited un-

til I had a better view before shooting; but that was just one split second out of forty-nine years. One split second that can ruin my life—and Peggy's—and the kids'." He raised his head and looked at Paul. "It's crazy; it's not fair."

The roaring returned for a time and the voice faded and then slowly came back.

" . . . have to admit that when I got to that phone booth I was tempted to just keep on driving. I figured you would die no matter what and no one would ever know I had anything to do with it. Can you believe that? Talk about heaping one dumb thing on top of another."

Paul was having trouble concentrating. What was the man saying? What did he mean? It seemed important somehow, but he couldn't collect his thoughts.

The man levered himself to his feet and stood shaking his head. "My rifle was here and my coat and undershirt and, besides, you might be found alive. I must be the world's prize dunce for even considering such a thing."

He picked up his hunting jacket from off Paul, and walked over to where he had dropped his rifle when he came into the clearing. The wind had died and the sounds of the bolt shoving the cartridge into the chamber were sharp and clear, but Paul never heard the shot.

FICTION

# That Summer at the Lake

by Nancy C. Swoboda

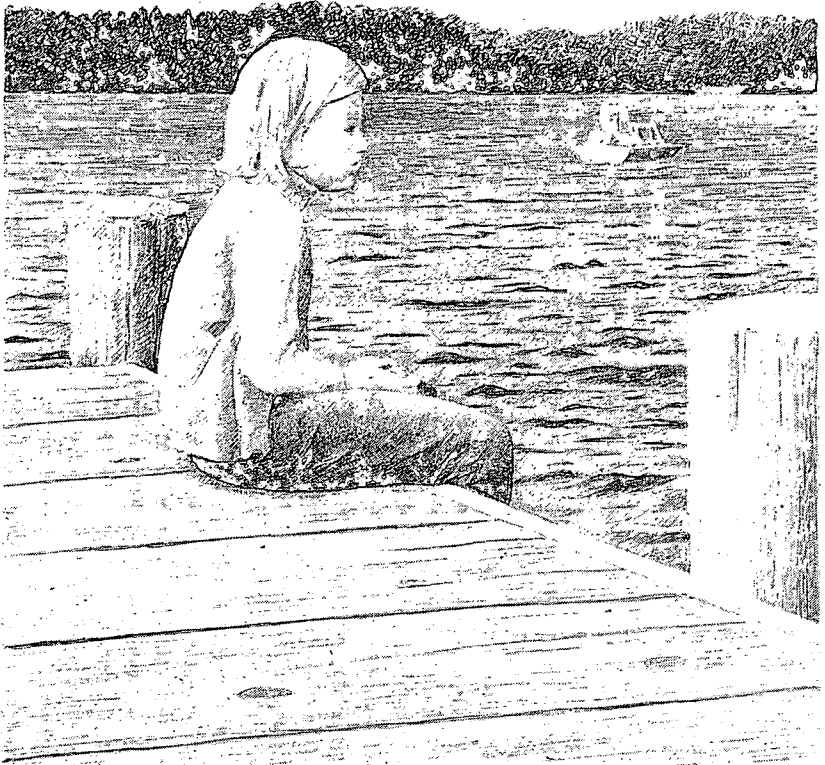


Illustration by Richard Crist

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I was eleven that summer. It was during World War II and I'd been busy collecting tin cans and learning the silhouettes of enemy planes as well as ours. Usually our family would take a vacation in the car, but because of gas rationing my father planned something a little different. It turned out to be a summer I'll never forget.

There was a lake about three hours' drive from the city, a big one with lots of bays, a few sand beaches, and an amusement park. In those days it was still rustic for the most part. There were some year round homes, but the rest of the settlement around the lake consisted of cottages and two or three inns with a main lodge and little cabins.

A few of the roads were blacktop but some were still dirt, with big old trees weaving a green archway overhead to keep you cool in the hot summer. My father had rented a cabin from a friend of his just off the blacktop that took you past most of the permanent homes.

Our cabin was modest, built of logs, and had only the basics. The best thing about it was the big screened porch facing the lake. You could sit out there at night and see the lights from the amusement park, hear the screams from the roller coaster float across the water. To get to the lake you had to take a small path to a flight of board steps with a pipe handrail. They led down to a narrow wooden dock supported by half a dozen posts sunk into the rocky bottom.

We didn't have a boat, of course, but the way the land there jutted out, you could imagine you were riding the waves if you stood at the very end of the dock and watched the water ripple in to lap at the pilings. I got so intent one time that the movement sort of hypnotized me and I fell in. My mother, father, and sister were on the porch when I made my soggy appearance, and once assured I was all right, they laughed until tears came.

As a tomboy I was always into something. Batman and Robin were my heroes, I read mysteries all summer long and was very serious about my investigations. At that moment I felt I'd lost credibility, but I still laugh, myself, in picturing that puny little girl in a wilted sunsuit and long blonde curls full of seaweed. You'd be surprised how it brings things into proper perspective.

My adventurous spirit wasn't dampened for long. To the north of our cabin was undeveloped land. It sloped down from a level

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stand of trees and formed a little cove with about four feet of sand beach that inclined gradually into the water. It was a much better place in which to swim, since you could walk out and lie into your crawl or dog paddle. At the dock you had to jump into the cold green lake to avoid the slimy, rocky bottom at the shore.

I discovered that the current combined with the little cove to wash interesting things onto the sand, and I took to getting up early to see what treasure had arrived during the night. Sometimes it was only a dead walleye or an old sneaker. But once I found a ring. I was sure it was a real ruby, but my father told me it was only glass. I also found a perfectly good head of lettuce. Mother said it smelled like fish and threw it in the trash.

Nearby, on our south, was one of those permanent homes. It was white clapboard with a green roof and a porch across the front and along the side next to our cabin. They had a big, sturdy, T-shaped dock and a boathouse built into the hill under the house.

The Warrens lived there. Mr. Warren, Carl, was a tall, rangy man who looked prosperous even in leisure clothes. He was deeply tanned, had a gap in his front teeth that was attractive, and wore his hair parted in the middle. He reminded me of a character from *The Great Gatsby*. He was friendly, and I liked his smile. It made crinkles around his kind hazel eyes.

My father knew who Carl was through the Rotary Club. He was in stocks and bonds and very well off, a descendant of old money and a Main Line family.

Marion Warren, his wife, fascinated me, for some reason. I liked to watch her when she went out on the dock. It seemed to me that she was always acting, as if her every move was being observed. Those were the years of big movie stars—Bette Davis, Joan Crawford—and I liked to think of Marion in the same category, playing her most important role.

According to Father, the Warrens were in their early fifties, which to me at my age put them over the hill but made Marion even more interesting. She looked great with her white one-piece bathing suit, her nice, smooth, bronzed skin, and her pretty face with its small, sharp features. Her face was getting leathery, though, and her false eyelashes didn't help a bit to make her hard blue eyes any softer or bigger. I wondered if the auburn hair done in a stylish bob was dyed.

My kindly father didn't comment directly on her when I asked



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him about Marion, but I understood his meaning when he said, "For all his wealth, Carl's as comfortable as an old shoe."

Mother, sitting quietly in a camp chair knitting, gave a snort. "I knew Marion when she clerked at Harper's Department Store. Carl may be an old shoe, but she acts as if she'd been born in glass slippers."

What they were saying was that Marion Warren was a snob. I suppose that was true, for when she and good old Carl were out on their dock he'd always smile and wave to me. She'd just give a glance from under those eyelashes and turn her head away.

There were two sons, as well. The oldest was married and working for his father. Rick was eighteen, and my sister Grace, two years younger than he, had spotted him the first day we arrived. He was cute, all right, good build, curly brown hair, his mother's fine features. He had real McCoy eyelashes over wide hazel eyes. But you could tell, just by the way he strutted out on the dock in his yellow trunks and tanned muscles, that he was stuck on himself.

Grace was content to admire him from afar, sort of like she did Van Johnson in her movie magazines. Even I could tell that Rick was too fast and worldly for her. Without knowing it he sure cooled any hot crush she might have been working up to the night we went skinny dipping.

The air was still and warm and the folks said it was okay if Grace and I took a late swim while they kept an eye on us from the porch. There was no lighting anywhere near our dock, so she and I decided after we were in the water that it would be fun to take off our suits and paddle around. Well, we tossed them onto the dock and they lit on it in a heap close to the shallows.

About the time we decided the water was too cold for bare skin, up zoomed Rick in the motor boat. He had the spotlight on to guide him into the boat hoist, which happened to be on the side next to our dock. We headed for the pilings and stayed out of sight. Rick had been drinking and had trouble with his steering. On top of that he was using some pretty bad language. It took him almost twenty minutes to get that darn boat secured and himself up to the house. We emerged, a couple of cold prunes, then. That marked the end of crushes and skinny dipping both!

One of the luckier things Grace and I happened into was making friends with Audrey. My father had gone off from his harem to fish, and Mother said she'd treat us to lunch at Ruby's. It was

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maybe a three block walk up one of those tree-lined roads to the little cafe where they made the best malts and hamburgers you could imagine. For fifty cents, including big thick french fries and a whole dill pickle.

Audrey and her mother were the only other customers, and we all got to visiting. Next thing you know, Audrey said she'd stop by later that day and take us for a tour around the lake in her boat. Her family had built a summer cottage in the best bay years before and lived in a nearby town. They knew the ground-up history of people and places all around there. I figured we were in for an interesting afternoon.

Audrey was nineteen, small with a cloud of reddish blonde curls that always looked as if she'd combed them with a whisk, a rosebud mouth, and sleepy blue eyes. Despite our differing ages we made a good trio and spent a lot of time giggling over nothing. She also taught Grace and me how to play bridge to occupy the rainy afternoons.

We were feeling very chic standing out there on the old rickety dock as Audrey cruised up for us in the nifty little inboard motor boat. And Grace loved it that Rick, shading his eyes with one hand, was watching our departure from his porch.

I tried to act blasé, but it was quite a thrill when Audrey pushed the throttle forward, the bow rose up in the air, and we zoomed out into open water. And what a tour we had past bays and coves and back again to the middle of the lake, where Audrey shut off the engine. We sat there in the bright sun talking while the water rocked and slapped at the boat. I've liked that sound ever since.

Of course we discussed the Warrens, beginning with Rick.

Audrey screwed up her tiny nose. "Spoiled, conceited, and wild. Last girl he dated went on an extended tour in Europe . . . if you know what I mean."

I thought I did and Grace looked rather glum. "Oh well," I cracked. "Maybe the army'll straighten him out when his number comes up."

Audrey went on. "Mr. Warren's a dear, long suffering. I think Marion is a witch, spelled with a B."

She blushed, remembering my age, but I loved the racy expression.

"How come?" I egged her on.

"Mr. Warren had a longtime sweetheart, but they had a spat

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over some silly thing. That's when Marion stepped in and trapped him."

"Trapped him?" I could imagine Marion as a young woman, batting her false eyelashes and playing up to Carl like Lana Turner did to John Garfield in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Audrey hesitated. "Well, let's just say they had to get married."

"Oh," Grace said softly.

An oncoming boat put a stop to our gossip session. It was a little beauty, a cabin cruiser, Audrey said. The canvas over the bridge was royal blue, and the rest was snowy white with teak wood and brass.

Audrey's sleepy eyes went wide. "Someone new. Wonder who it is? That's the fanciest craft this old lake has ever seen."

It cruised by, leaving a wide foamy wake that made our boat bob up and down like a cork. We couldn't make out the skipper, but now we had something else to talk about. Just then a high-pitched buzz drew our attention away from the lake and up to the clear blue sky. Two specks flew side by side, heading north.

"P-38's!" I shouted. "Aren't they beautiful? If I were old enough, and a boy, I'd be up there right now, ferrying planes for the Air Corps."

Audrey looked surprised and pleased. "That settles it. Wait until I tell you what's going to happen tomorrow . . . and you're both invited."

She beamed when she told us about her boyfriend, a pilot in the Army Air Corps. He had written her a letter to let her know in a roundabout way that his squadron was going overseas. The refueling stop was the air base near the lake. And tomorrow, at eleven thirty A.M., he'd promised to buzz her dock to wave goodbye.

Grace swooned against a life preserver. "Oh . . . how romantic."

We had to promise to be out on our dock at ten thirty in case Audrey's sweetheart was early, and we had to promise to get off her dock when he flew over so that he would see just her out there blowing kisses at him.

It had been an exciting day. Grace and I chattered on all through dinner, and I think my father was a little disappointed that we didn't show the same enthusiasm for the beautiful pike he'd caught that afternoon and that Mother had fried so delicately in buttered bread crumbs.

I went down to the dock just before bedtime to sit and look out

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over the water. A creak came from the Warrens' dock. It was Marion, out for her nightly swim. She had on a two-piece suit and one of those fancy, flowery caps like Esther Williams wore. It was always the same routine. I'd come to notice she'd go down the ladder at the deep end of the dock and swim out toward the middle of the lake with never a sound. I felt sorry for her somehow, that no one was there to watch out for her, to see that she made it back to safety through the dark water.

I don't have to tell you that the next morning's events have remained vivid in my memory. Audrey's gallant pilot buzzed her dock at exactly eleven thirty A.M. The B-25 darkened the sun for several moments; it seemed to hover low over the water while Audrey waved both arms, offered two-handed kisses, and then stood quietly at the end of the dock watching the plane disappear up into big puffy clouds. I could hear Grace sniffing beside me, and my eyes were a little wet, too.

I left the two of them sitting on the dock painting their toenails and talking about mushy stuff that I hadn't yet come to accept as important. I told Grace I was going to walk back to the cabin and thanked Audrey for giving me my first look at a real bomber.

I took the dirt road because it was more interesting. It went close to the lake, and when I came to a small, deserted cove, I could see a big pier extending way out into deep water. It looked worse than ours, and I figured it was an old fishing dock. On past it, in a grove of trees, I spotted a car. It belonged to Carl Warren. Well, that was odd. His dock went out far enough for catching almost anything in the lake. The car was empty and I got a creepy feeling alone out there, so I made tracks over to the road. Ruby's Cafe was just a few yards away, and I stopped there to catch my breath.

After two games on the pinball machine, my hamburgers and malts were ready to go. Mother was alone at the cabin, and I'm glad I took lunch back for the two of us. It was one of the best times I remember, sitting out on the porch with her, a fresh breeze cooling us and making tiny lace caps on the water.

I noticed the dock at the Warrens' was empty. Mother told me that Rick and Mr. Warren had had some words while Grace and I were at Audrey's. Their boat was almost new, she gathered, and was guaranteed not to capsize. Rick had evidently been taking it out trying to do just that and had put a big gouge in the side, deep enough to let in water. Mr. Warren sent Rick off in the boat to get

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it repaired and then left in his car. Mother said he was really upset. Seems he'd planned to use the boat that morning.

Mother went to wash her hair then. There was a big Saturday night dance at the Inn. It was the largest building on the lake and catered to folks who wanted all the comforts of a hotel. It reminded me of a riverboat parked on dry land. Four stories high, it had balconies across the front facing the water, lots of gingerbread, a ballroom on the top floor, a gift shop, and a restaurant.

Grace and I got to tag along. Father winked at my sister when we were ready to go.

"Just might be a nice young man there tonight, honey. But save me one dance." Then he turned to me. "And you, Batman, I'm sure you'll be investigating. After dinner you can look around . . . if you check in with us every so often to let us know where you are and what you're doing."

Before we left to go to the Inn I saw Rick come back to the Warren dock in a motor boat about the size of Audrey's, only older. It must have been a "loaner" while the big speedboat was being repaired. Then, at the Inn, from my vantage point on the ballroom balcony, I saw that mysterious cabin cruiser tied up at a slip in front. Either the owner had come to the dance or had taken rooms here, I guessed.

Our family went through the buffet line and got a nice table near the orchestra. They were a pretty fair band and played like Glenn Miller. I managed two chocolate eclairs before being excused to investigate the Inn. The gift shop was open, and the nice clerk, an older lady with blue hair and a sailor dress, let me wander through. The lobby was done in oak with lots of spindles and a cage elevator.

Once I'd seen all that, I went outside. The view of the amusement park was much closer from the Inn. I could hear the merry-go-round piping out "Moon over Miami" above the beat of that little snare drum that makes all the tunes sound the same. I picked a spot under a big tree in front of the Inn and sat down on the grass where I could keep an eye on the cabin cruiser.

Then I heard a woman's voice behind me and looked up to see her standing on the second floor balcony. She was talking to someone in the room, but I couldn't tell who it was or hear the other end of the conversation.

She said: "We've both paid dearly for our mistakes. It wasn't just Frederick's death that released me. It's this war and what I

heard . . . there in my own home! It could be over for all of us if that horrid bomb . . . ”

The person inside said something before she continued.

“I knew you would! Oh, please, let’s not waste precious time. Will you go with me?”

A muffled response.

“That’s why I came here first, to see you. I’ve already checked out, to spend the night on board getting things ready. I’m sure they’ll want me to fly to Washington or somewhere. But I’m going to meet first with several of them from the base tomorrow, out on the boat, to see if what I know is of any help.”

By then, I had sneaked up as close as I could get and still be in the shadow of the tree. The woman on the balcony had on a tailored white dress and wore her dark hair in a bun at the back of her neck. She reminded me of Rosalind Russell. I tried to catch a glimpse of the other person, but it was too high up to see into the room.

As she started through the door there was a noise in the bushes along the ground floor railing. But to tell you the truth, I was afraid to investigate after hearing what that woman had said. It sure sounded like spy talk, and maybe there was a secret agent lurking in the bushes. Could have been a skunk, too.

It was time to report back to my folks in the ballroom, anyway. I had my hand on the side door when she came out. In the entryway light I got a good look at her. She was older, maybe fifty, but her skin was smooth and white. There were gray streaks in the black hair, and her brown eyes were soft but alert. When she saw me she smiled, then strode down to the cabin cruiser and took off toward the middle of the lake.

I didn’t tell my folks about my experience. I wanted to think about it, see what happened tomorrow. We got back to the cabin an hour or so later. It was well past ten. The Warrens’ house was dark and quiet. None of them had been to the dance. I supposed it was too corny for Marion to attend. Before I went to bed, I looked over the lake and thought I saw the cabin cruiser anchored out near the point.

As usual, but after a series of wild dreams, I woke up early to go check my special cove. It was cloudy and windy that morning. The lake looked gray and rough, and I could see in the daylight that it really was the cabin cruiser anchored out there, riding the

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swells. Before I'd done my sit-slide halfway down the hill I could see something floating in closer and closer to the sandy beach with each wave.

At first I thought it was a piece of sail and spar, but as it reached the shallows I could see that it was a body, floating face down, arms out in front. She still had on that tailored white dress and her dark hair held tight by the bun at the back of her neck was in perfect order.

It seemed as if my legs were full of lead when I climbed back up the bank and tried to run to our cabin. Breathless and shaking, I woke my parents and told them what I'd found. There was no phone, so my father pulled on some pants over his pajamas and hurried next door to the Warrens' to call the authorities. Marion let him in.

When he came back, Carl was with him, and the two of them went over to the bank and looked down. My father had to keep Carl from going over the edge. Finally, he slumped down against a tree. His tanned face was the color of putty, and I thought he was going to die right there.

Well, they came pretty quick for a small resort town, two of the harbor patrolmen by boat and the sheriff and a doctor in a car with a flashing red light. Marion and Rick were out at the far end of their dock, watching. After a long while the officials finished down there, and I was glad for everyone that they took her body away by boat.

When Mr. Warren asked to ride back into town with the sheriff, things began making sense to me, but I still didn't tell anyone what I knew. I sat on the screened porch and watched the cruiser. It looked forlorn out there, but not for long. A speedboat came alongside, and four men boarded it. Two of them looked like military personnel.

The newspaper account helped me considerably. "The dead woman's name was Margaret vonHelig, wife of Frederick vonHelig, a recently deceased but very important German physicist known to be active in experiments with heavy water. Mrs. vonHelig had left Berlin abruptly after her husband's death and had contacted military authorities yesterday upon her arrival with possible information helpful to national security.

"At approximately ten P.M. last evening, Mrs. vonHelig was stabbed and thrown overboard from her boat, anchored offshore.



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Military officials will not confirm or deny that any pertinent information was recovered. Mrs. vonHelig was killed with a fishing knife. The fact that she was scheduled to meet with government officials gives cause for speculation that enemy agents might have silenced her.

"Mrs. vonHelig had retained her American citizenship, despite having lived in Berlin for the past twenty-five years with her husband. She was the former Margaret Allison. There are no survivors."

I had it all—well, mostly—figured out along with my evidence and was ready to present it to my folks to see if I should go to the sheriff when another tragedy struck.

It was just two days after the murder. Rick Warren had picked up Marion from a bridge foursome across the lake. They were still using the loaner then. Evidently Rick forgot that the older boat didn't have much power when he cut in front of another craft. They were hit broadside, and Marion was killed outright. Rick will have some bad scars for the rest of his life.

After that, I decided to keep my investigation to myself. Even if enemy spies had been responsible for Mrs. vonHelig's death, it was unlikely they'd be caught. As for the fishing knife, they were as common as toothpicks around the lake. My father had bought one at the general store. But my conclusion took a different slant.

Margaret vonHelig was Carl Warren's first sweetheart. Audrey confirmed that. After her husband died, she felt free to come back to the United States, as well as feeling a loyalty to her country. Having heard of the terrible weapon her husband had been working on, she knew time was short, wanted to be with Carl at the last.

The morning Rick damaged the speedboat was the morning Carl had planned to use it to meet with Margaret. Instead, she picked him up at the old fishing dock, where he left his car. Marion must have suspected something was up, and I'll bet she was the someone I heard in the bushes that night by the Inn when Carl gave Margaret his answer, that he would go with her.

Marion was capable of swimming out to Margaret's boat, and I think she did so that same night. I don't think she meant to kill her, but pride and prestige meant more to her. And Carl did intend to leave her. She had a lot of gumption, all right. Just two days after the murder she was back in her social routine, playing bridge as if nothing had happened.

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All that from an imaginative eleven-year-old sounds farfetched, doesn't it? I have one more thing to add and then I'll let you draw your own conclusions. That morning at the cove, as Margaret's body came floating in, I saw something caught on the bracelet of her wristwatch that washed loose and came ashore first. In my shock I picked it up and, as I ran for the cabin, unconsciously put it in my pocket.

Later, after things had calmed down, I remembered and took it out for a look. It was a bright, perky, rubber flower. I'm sure they would have found that it came from Marion's bathing cap.

Mind you, that's not conclusive, but I don't think there were any enemy agents around to do away with Mrs. vonHelig. After the war was over, the government cited her posthumously for her actions. They found her journal on board the boat with plenty of classified material. Spies would never have left that behind.

Poor Mr. Warren came out of it all right. If nothing else he can know in his heart that Margaret always loved him and maybe even helped her country to be first to have the atom bomb that ended the war.

Audrey married her pilot, who, incidentally, was part of an alternate crew for the *Enola Gay*. They were both glad he wasn't called.

Grace married just the right man. He still loves to send her flowers for no reason at all. They have two darling girls.

I guess I never mentioned my name. It's Nancy. I married a police detective by the last name of Drew. Kind of figures, doesn't it?

FICTION

# Buck McCoy Meets His Maker

by Robert Loy



## Chapter 6

As he pulled his bedroll out of the saddlebag and prepared to bed down for the night, Buck McCoy reflected on all he had accomplished that day. His morning had been spent build-

ing a barn and digging a well for the pretty Widow Jenkins. In the afternoon he had fought off a savage Comanche war-party and drove the spikes for the new railroad across Wyoming. Buck wasn't used to all this inactivity, and he hoped tomorrow would

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

*bring him a little excitement.*

*Suddenly—*

The phone rang. I switched off the typewriter and walked to the kitchen to answer it.

"Arrrgh!" I screamed into the mouthpiece.

"Good, you're working." It was Charles Talon, as I'd suspected. "Halpers is really breathing down my neck for the new book, Ernie."

"The Buck McCoy?"

"Of course the Buck McCoy. What else?"

"What else? What else? What kind of crummy agent are you? How about *The Body in the Bathtub*, *The Corpse in the Closet*, or *The Stiff in the Stable*? My mystery novels, Charlie."

"Oh, those. Sorry, not a nibble."

"You're fired."

"Heh-heh. Seriously, Ernie, I need that final draft by last Thursday. How soon can you get it to me?"

"Heh-heh. Seriously, Charlie, how about shortly after hell freezes over. While you're waiting, why don't you go there and see what the wind chill factor is."

I slammed down the receiver, walked back to my desk, and blew smoke for fifteen minutes. I was mad enough to kill somebody.

Buck McCoy, frontier legend,

fastest gun in fiction. I created him; he controls me. I gave him life, and in return he made me a wealthy man, a famous writer, a bitter, frustrated hack. My fingers were itching. I *wanted* to kill somebody.

My name is Ernie Causway. I am a mystery writer. I can see you out there shaking your head and saying, "No, you're a western writer." You're wrong.

Several years ago, when I was a struggling young mystery writer desperate to get something, anything, published, I wrote a short story about a wandering gunfighter named Buck McCoy and submitted it to a western magazine. To my surprise it was accepted and published. To my amazement it was anthologized in *Best Western Stories of the Year*, and then made into a TV movie. I was delighted. All of a sudden, I had arrived. I was in the wrong field, of course, but I was *there*.

I got an agent who lined me up a lucrative deal for a Buck McCoy novel. I wrote it, cashed my royalty checks, paid a few overdue bills, and set to work doing what I have always wanted to do: write mystery fiction. I sent these out to various publishers. They all came back. All my brilliant mystery books and stories flew right back to my mailbox accompanied by

notes from the publishers which said that they were not interested in my detective stuff but would love to handle my next Buck McCoy.

That's how it's been ever since. I have written fourteen Buck McCoy novels, one collection of Buck McCoy short stories, two Buck McCoy movie screenplays, and a Buck McCoy television pilot. I have also written six beautiful, baffling mystery novels (none published), and more than a hundred clever detective stories (none published), and I am about half finished with a nonfiction project dear to my heart: a biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the greatest mystery writer of all time (who, incidentally, never wrote a western).

Charles Talon, my agent, was no help at all. He handled some of my mysteries, but that was just to humor me. He discouraged me from writing mysteries. He knows how fed up I am with Buck McCoy, but he makes sure I keep churning them out.

I glared at the latest sagebrush soap opera in my typewriter. That's exactly what I was doing—churning out another one. That's what I'd be doing for the rest of my life unless I got up the nerve to do something about it. My fingers were itching even worse than before. I knew what I had to do.

I was going to have to kill him. Buck McCoy, not my agent.

It seemed strange to use the word kill in reference to a fictional character like Buck, but it was the only word to use. He had gotten so popular and so well known it was almost like he was real. In fact, to the world at large, he was more real than I was. Buck gets about two hundred pieces of mail a day—love letters, requests for autographs or advice. All I ever get is bills and Montgomery Ward circulars. Whenever I am mentioned in articles or reviews, they never print just my name—Ernie Causway—they write Ernie (Buck McCoy) Causway. That's so readers will know who I am. Oh yes, they say, he's the guy that's a close personal friend of Buck McCoy. But no more. I would never again see Buck McCoy's name grafted onto the middle of mine. I was going to send that hombre to Boot Hill.

In researching Doyle, I had learned that he faced a similar problem. His creation, Sherlock Holmes, had gotten too popular, and Doyle was sick of him. So he wrote a story in which the famous detective was killed, and that should have been the end of it. But Doyle made one mistake, and as Holmes himself might have said, that proved his undoing. There was no cor-

*pus delicti*. In the story Holmes never returned from a cliffside battle with his nemesis Professor Moriarty. He was missing and presumed dead, presumed dead by Doyle at least. His readers had more faith. They knew the great detective was still alive. They wrote Doyle threatening letters, and refused to buy his other books. Eventually, Doyle resurrected the man in the deerstalker. From then on he wrote mediocre Sherlock Holmes stories when he wrote at all, which wasn't often due to his consuming interest in spiritualism. Doyle believed he could communicate with beings in other realms, which goes to show how even a great mind can go soggy if it lets its fictional protagonist get out of control.

I was not going to make the same mistake. I have no interest in spiritualism, and when I was through with Buck McCoy everyone would know that he was dead. Buck was going to come to a very real end, and I was going to go on to bigger and better things.

I was anxious to get this murder over with, so I turned to the typewriter and started writing from where I had left off.

*Suddenly, Killer Miller and his gang topped the ridge, looking for revenge. Buck's heart*

*sank as he saw how many there were. There were only sixteen of them, hardly even a challenge.*

*All sixteen of the desperadoes had their rifles trained on Buck. Buck drew his pistol, fired six shots, reloaded, fired six more shots, reloaded again, and fired four more. Killer Miller and his gang lay dead.*

*"Ho hum," Buck yawned as he moved his bedroll upwind. He whistled for Pronto, his faithful palomino. A huge flaming meteorite fell from the heavens. It crashed into Buck McCoy and smashed him to atoms.*

### *The End*

For Buck. For me it was a new beginning. I was free at last. Now I would be able to make a name for myself in the mystery field. I ripped Buck McCoy's epitaph out of the typewriter and cranked in a clean white sheet of paper. I decided to work on Doyle's biography first. I was at the point where Doyle made his colossal mistake and brought Holmes back from the dead. Before I could start, however, I was interrupted by a knock at the front door. Ordinarily I am as grouchy as a bear awakened from hibernation when someone disturbs me while I'm working. But Buck McCoy was dead, I was going to be a famous

mystery writer, and nothing could spoil my euphoric mood. I whistled as I went to answer the door.

A craggy-faced man in a white robe and pointy-toed boots stood on my doorstep. I didn't know cultists went door-to-door. Living in southern California, I have gotten used to seeing a lot of weirdos, but it was a shock to find out they made house calls.

"I'm here," the man informed me.

"I see that," I said. "The question is why are you here?"

"Well, wasn't you expecting me, sir?"

"No, I wasn't."

"Aw, now, don't say that." His voice took on a pleading tone. "You know I always tried to do right, and I've been a believer all my life. And, look, I—"

"Wait a minute."

"I found the robe, all laid out nice and purty, just my size and everything. I know I'm supposed to be here. Please don't make me go down there."

"What are you talking about?" I asked. "Down where?"

"You know. Don't trifle with me, please, boss."

"Who are you?"

"Buck McCoy, sir, and if you'll give me a chance I can explain about that gal in Laredo. You see—"

"Hold it. Hold it right there. Whoever you are, I am not amused."

"No, sir. I can't say this is the jolliest moment of my life, neither."

"Who are you really?"

"Just like I said, boss."

Maybe insanity is contagious, I don't know. I can't otherwise explain why I invited the man in for a drink.

"Liquor?" His face lit up. "You got liquor up here? Hot dog! I knew it wasn't all harp playing and cloud sitting."

As he followed me into the house, I tried to think who would go to such lengths to play a joke on me. I was by then convinced that the man was not a lunatic as I'd originally assumed, but a very skillful actor hired by some friend of mine. Would Charlie Talon go to such lengths to keep me home on the range? But no, that was impossible. I had told no one of my plan to murder Buck McCoy. Oh well, I told myself, I'll figure it out later, right now I have to play the host.

I mixed us a couple of martinis. My hands were a bit shaky, but I carefully measured the vermouth. I make my martinis very arid.

I needn't have been so particular; my guest poured his down his throat as if it were water. He handed me the empty



glass and let his eyes roam around my living room.

"T'ain't at all like I pictured it, boss," he said.

Something about the way he said it was familiar to me. I had heard his voice somewhere before. He must have seen the shock on my face.

"Not that it ain't nice, it's beautiful. I know I'll be real happy here."

The blood rushed to my head. I had to sit down. A thousand times I had sat at the typewriter and heard that voice in my head. I looked at the man, and I knew he was telling the truth. He was really Buck McCoy in the flesh. Somehow literary death had brought him to life and my living room. Or maybe Buck McCoy had become more real than I had realized, and when I sent him to meet his maker he naturally came to me.

My problem now was what to do with him. As I pondered, my gaze fell to the floor, and I saw that the angel Buck was wearing spurs on his boots. Large chunks of my plush carpet were impaled on those spurs. I did not want this man for a roommate.

"What do you want me to do first, boss? Just wander around and get the feel of the spread?"

"No," I said, as I steered Buck toward the sofa. "Just sit right

here while I fill out some forms. Red tape, you know."

"Sure, boss, whatever you say." As I seated Buck, I wished I had been more careful about his hygiene. He obviously hadn't had a bath for several thousand pages.

I sat at my desk and stared at the clean white sheet of paper in my typewriter. I thought of all the great mysteries that would never be written on it. I tried, but I couldn't make my fingers hit the keys. Maybe there was another way. I shifted in my seat to look at Buck. He was munching on a plug of tobacco, and as I watched in horror, he spit a mouthful of brown goo into my Ming vase.

My fingers flew across the keyboard.

## Chapter 7

*From the ashes, Buck McCoy miraculously arose. He brushed the dirt and soot off his duds.*

*"Whew," he told Pronto, "that was a close one."*

I did not have to look up to know that I was once more alone in the house.

Surprisingly enough, I still have no interest in spiritualism. I now believe that Doyle's mistake was in keeping Sherlock Holmes as a houseguest for as long as he did.

FICTION

# The Rendering by Rob Kantner



*Illustration by Nick Jainschigg*

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When the scream ended, the harsh male voice came back on the phone. "Get the picture now?"

Stump Jackson, dry-mouthed, stared blankly through the big glass wall at his silver twin-engine Piper Chieftain parked at the ramp in the gathering dusk. "I got it."

The voice chuckled in his ear. "Good. Sure you got the coordinates right?"

Jackson repeated them and added, "What's going on?"

"None of your damn business. You just fly the bird and do like we said. And don't forget about the whisky. It's under the copilot's seat. Make sure the big guy in the gray suit drinks it after you land. The *big* guy, in the *gray* suit."

"I hear you." Jackson looked for comfort around the drab, spare Fly-Us Airlines office, and found none. "I'll do exactly what you said. I promise. Please—don't—"

The voice said, "Her back is to me, and I've got my arm across her throat. Squeeze a little, and the breathing gets hard. A little more pressure, and she starts to gag. A little more and you can see the bluish purple rising in her neck. A little more and that cute throat crushes like a dry cornstalk. The hickey

to end all hickeys." The connection broke.

As Jackson slowly replaced the receiver, he found that his fists were knotted so hard his arms hurt. He stretched, unbinding his muscles, finished his cigarette with one hot hit, unleaned himself from the top of the desk, walked through the glass doors onto the apron, and stared down the flight line toward the main terminal.

A thousand heroic and impractical strategies came to mind, but Jackson discarded them. With Suzanne's life in danger, there really was only one strategy open to him: to do as he was told. Exactly.

A plain black sedan pulled up to his right and parked. Jackson checked his watch and decided that these must be his passengers. Even from here he could see that one of the two was a big guy in a gray suit.

Poor bastard.

Dick Dennehy shut off the engine, silently unlocked the cuff binding his passenger to the doorhandle, snapped the cuff tightly around his own right wrist, and threw open his door. "Come on, Frankie." He slid out and his passenger clumsily followed him. Dennehy looked at the Piper Chieftain—empty

—then saw a tall young stringbean of a man wearing a leather flight jacket and blue ball cap, come toward him from the airline office.

"This the bus to Detroit?" Dennehy asked pleasantly.

"Yes, sir." The stringbean's eyes flicked nervously from Dennehy to his companion, eyes freezing for a second on the handcuffs, and back.

From his back pants pocket Dennehy fetched his wallet and flipped it open. "Dick Dennehy, Michigan State Police."

The stringbean squinted at the I.D. "Okay, inspector. I'm Stump Jackson."

Dennehy, a squarish, middle-aged six-footer, grinned up into Jackson's eyes. "Nice nickname. Heh."

He gestured at his companion. "Allow me to introduce Frank Indelicato. I'd recite his entire rap sheet for you, but I want to get back to Detroit sometime this month. Suffice it to say that Frankie was doing penance for an armed robbery at your prison farm in Kazoo till a couple of weeks ago when he walked away. Got all the way here, and had it made till a public-spirited citizen recognized his mug from the post-office wall and whapped him with her aluminum cane." Dennehy gave his prisoner a look of fond

menace. "Real bright chapter in your saga, huh, Frankie?"

Indelicato was a short, heavily muscled, swarthy man with jet-black hair. It amused Dennehy that Indelicato, known for his passion for thousand-dollar suits, jewelry, and sartorial perfection, wore jeans and a madras shirt this evening. Worse, he apparently hadn't even had his nails buffed lately. Slob. Well, you had to make some sacrifices when you were on the run from the law.

Indelicato silently gave the pilot a steely-eyed lethal look. The pilot asked nervously, "Extraditing him back, inspector?"

"Rendering him, actually. Extradition, technically speaking, is between countries; rendering is between states. But you got the picture. The younger troopers get the exciting jobs; I hold down a desk and babysit clowns like this on their trips back to justice."

Indelicato said, "Just a pudgy flatfoot errand boy, huh, Dennehy?"

The detective noticed Jackson's apprehension. Normally, he would have made verbal if not physical retaliation to Indelicato's statement, but he remembered to stay in character. "Come on, Frankie," he sighed. "Let's keep things calm and peaceful and get it over with.

The more boring this trip is, the better." He looked at the nervous pilot. "Shall we go?"

The Chieftain seated eight passengers, but was empty except for Dennehy, Indelicato, and Jackson as it taxied away from the apron toward the small runway. Dennehy sat with Indelicato at the back. The felon, still handcuffed to Dennehy's right wrist, stared out the small window at the runway lights. Dennehy watched the tall, thin pilot as he whispered into his headset and scanned the illuminated gauges on the dashboard.

As the aircraft swung right onto the runway, Stump Jackson depressed the throttles. The Chieftain picked up speed rapidly, the aircraft wobbled and shook slightly amid the roar of her dual engines until, with a sweet peaceful feeling, the aerodynamics took over and lifted the aircraft into the night air.

Dick Dennehy glanced at the expressionless face of Frank Indelicato, and at the back of Stump Jackson's head. He maintained a bored, almost sleepy expression himself, but inside he wondered when something was going to happen.

No one said anything as the aircraft gained altitude and swung into a north-northeast

bearing, leaving the city of Amherstburg far behind.

Then, ten minutes into the flight, the drone of the starboard engine was broken by a cough. It ran smooth for a moment, then coughed a couple more times.

Dick Dennehy leaned forward. "We having a problem there, Stump?"

Frank Indelicato listened to the rough-running starboard engine with pleasure. Now to see if the pilot would continue to follow instructions. He'd better, Indelicato thought grimly.

As for Dennehy, Indelicato was unworried. This was, Frank thought, a typical lardass cop with lots of years in. Big belly, fallen arches, slow reflexes, all the good hard street stuff—if he'd ever had any—beat out of him by years of big meals and payoffs and interminable surveillances broken up only by swigs from bottles and tons of cold, greasy pizza. Career cops could get slow and stupid and still keep their jobs. They had civil service and seniority and politics to protect them. Guys like Dennehy would never last in my work, Indelicato thought. We can't get out of shape, we can't lose our edge, not even when doing time, which was, to



Indelicato, simply an occupational hazard.

And one which he had no intention of going back to. Not this time, anyway. Not with all that cash money waiting.

The starboard engine ran rougher and rougher. The stringbean pilot fiddled with switches on the dashboard, very convincingly, Indelicato thought with approval. Dennehy leaned forward in his seat, watching the pilot, looking edgy. All to the good.

Indelicato could not resist saying, "Listen, Dennehy, this plane crashes and I'm killed, I'll sue your ass and the state of Michigan's, too."

Dennehy gave him a flat, hate-filled stare, then looked back toward the pilot. "What's happening, son?"

Jackson did not turn his head. "Sorry, inspector. Losing our oil pressure over to starboard. Can't make it back to Amherstburg. Have to take her in somewhere, and right quick, too."

"We going to crash, son?" Dennehy asked calmly.

"No, sir. This is all farmland out here. I'll take us in nice and easy. Hang tight, gentlemen. I'll call in the coordinates, we'll have help out here real soon."

Help, Indelicato thought with a grin that did not touch his lips. Right!

With the image in the back of his mind of Suzanne's throat crushing like a cornstalk, Stump Jackson gave no second thought to the lie he'd told Dennehy. The starboard engine of the Piper Chieftain had no oil pressure problem at all. Rather, Jackson had adjusted the fuel feed mix to render it extra rich. Even a high-compression radial engine like the Chieftain's wouldn't take that for long without conking out.

He fiddled with the feed as he closed in on the coordinates; it would not do to have the starboard engine die completely before getting on the final landing approach. When he had the approach lined up, he put the feed mix to max positive on the starboard engine, which obligingly died. Jackson fought the wheel to maintain trim as he adjusted the elevators and ailerons and brought her in on a steep descent, much steeper than he would have liked, the grassy meadow with a tree-lined creek to the right rising quickly toward him, grass a silvery-lead color in the moonlight.

The initial touchdown was a hard wheel-to-wheel bounce on the uneven meadow. Jackson fought the wheel grimly as the aircraft slewed from side to

side, the big twin tires finding little purchase on the long, soft grass. Jackson hoped to hell there were no hidden fissures or craters in the ground, no rusting farm implements concealed in the grass. That's all I need right now, he thought: hit something, flip the aircraft, and lose it on top of everything else. Fortunately, there was no incident as Jackson guided the slowing aircraft to a halt at the end of the meadow and shut down the engines.

In the sudden country silence, Stump Jackson gave a loud, involuntary sigh of relief and slumped against the back of his seat. Almost done now, he thought. He knew he was in the right place. Second meadow due east of Indian Lake, about ten miles away from the village of Luna Point. Creek to the right, a big stagnant pond to the left, right where it should be. Just two more little chores to do, and then . . .

He flipped his radio to an unused frequency and gave an SOS call loud enough for his passengers to hear it. Then he shut off the radio, unbuckled his seat belt, released the lock on his seat, and swiveled it so he could face his passengers. Bright moonlight poured through the small windows, making Dennehy look pasty

and frightened. Frank Indelicato's swarthy face was in shadow and unreadable. A chorus of bullfrogs and crickets sounded from outside as Dennehy said in a shaky voice, "Nice landing there, ace."

"Thanks," Jackson answered, mouth dry. "Someone'll be along in a while." He thought he saw Indelicato smile. "Hey, inspector," Jackson rushed on, "I got a little potable up here. You want some?"

"Potable?" Then, with more interest, "Booze?"

Jackson bent down and reached under the empty copilot's seat. Sure enough, there was a bottle there, a pint of Johnny Walker Red. The seal was unbroken. Jackson held it up so Dennehy could see it. "Have a belt?" Jackson asked, smiling, feeling like a snake.

Dick Dennehy unsnapped his seatbelt. "Abso-damn-lutely. Settle the dust." Reaching into his jacket pocket with his left hand, he retrieved a key, unlocked the cuff from his right wrist, and re-cuffed Indelicato to the arm of the seat. "Stay loose, Frankie," he said, then stepped forward and took the pint from Jackson.

The pilot watched as Dennehy uncapped the bottle with a twist and a snap. Indelicato was staring incuriously out the



moon-drenched window to his right as Dennehy, holding the bottle in his left hand, hoisted it, tipped it back, and gurgled. In the dim light, Jackson could see the profile of his gut, the heavily lined face, even the streaks of gray in his butch-cut blond hair. Routine boozier, he decided. Bastard's probably been twitching for a belt since we took off. Some kinda great dutiful cop, this one.

Dennehy lowered the bottle, burped, and wiped his mouth on his coat sleeve. "Great! Care for one there, Jackson?"

"No, sir." Jackson turned, crossed his arms, and stared through the windscreen across the barren grassy field.

"I don't drink," Indelicato said.

"Did I *ask*, creep?" Dennehy said roughly. He seemed about to say something more, but instead he coughed, once, twice, then made a long, throat-tearing series of them. Jackson spun to look.

**F**rank Indelicato stared up into Dennehy's face. In the pale light it was stretched tight, jaw clenched, eyes bugging out. The half-empty pint slipped from his hand as he grabbed his throat, then tumbled backward, bounced off a port seat, and crashed to the deck.

Crickets and frogs made their low throaty giggles from outside as Indelicato looked down at Dennehy's still legs. Then he said, "Okay, kid. Get the key off him."

Jackson climbed back from the cockpit and bent over Dennehy. "Oh *boy*, he smells something awful."

"Happens. Quick, get the key, boy. Now."

Jackson recovered the key from Dennehy's coat pocket, handed it to Indelicato, and stood. The convict released himself briskly and rose. "C'mon. Off the plane now."

Jackson opened the cockpit door, swung the ladder down, and descended. Indelicato followed him, flexing his wrist where the handcuff had bitten into it for the past few hours. The night air was sweet and wonderful, the feel of freedom. Jackson's face looked pale and drawn as he jerkily lighted a cigarette. "What was in that booze, anyhow?"

Indelicato strained for the sound of a motor and heard nothing. "Why do you ask, kid?"

"His eyes were still open. And there was blood coming out of his mouth."

"What are ya, Dr. Kildare?" Indelicato chuckled. "Some guys react to stuff like that. Not to worry, kid."

"Your people are going to turn Suzanne loose now, right?"

Indelicato was about to answer reassuringly when, at last, he heard a motor. They turned to look as a dark blue mini-van, brand-new down to the dealer plates, came bouncing up the grassy path toward them, lights off. It stopped, motor purring on idle, the doors came open like wings, and two burly men in jeans, hiking boots, and flannel shirts got out. "All set, Frankie?" the driver asked.

Indelicato nodded. He took a deep breath, thrilled to be in command again after days and days of jail. No problems now, he thought. Time for the money. "Take care of the plane, Virg. Sammy, you're with the kid here." Without looking to see that his orders were obeyed, he went to the mini-van and got into the third seat.

Virgil trotted over to the Chieftain and climbed inside. Sammy approached the pilot, said, "Stay cool, kid, everything's under control," then slugged him hard on the side of the head with a bricklike fist. Jackson dropped like a rock to the thistly grass as the Chieftain's twin engines whined, caught, and then fired.

Sammy grabbed the pilot by the collar of his flight jacket and effortlessly dragged him

toward the mini-van. The Chieftain's engines roared and the aircraft began to roll away from the van at slow taxiing speed. From the rear doorway jumped Virgil as the aircraft gained speed. With a snap of his wrists, Sammy tossed the pilot into the second seat of the van and slammed the rolling door shut. Virgil entered by the driver's door and took the wheel, Sammy took the shotgun seat, and the van slid smoothly forward as the Chieftain, some hundred yards away now, rolled into the wide, flat, stagnant pond, made way for a bit, then began to sink.

Stump Jackson sat on the threadbare divan, holding hands tightly with his wife. In the dim light of the shabby motel room Indelicato, Virgil, and Sammy stood together by the door, simultaneously keyed up and relaxed. They'd been there better than two hours now, and nothing had happened. They were obviously waiting for something.

Suzanne was bloodshot and pale but looked otherwise unmolested despite her hours of captivity. She wore tight, well-worn jeans and sneakers; she'd been cleaning their apartment—taking out the garbage,

actually—when Sammy and Virgil abducted her. Now, fearful eyes on their captors, she leaned close to Stump and whispered, "You sure you're all right?"

"Yeah." Actually, he was anything but. That big pudgy flatfoot Michigan state policeman had fallen for the biggest sucker play in the world. Jackson, hand clenching Suzanne's tightly, felt no remorse over his role in Dennehy's death. I'm a pilot, he argued with himself silently, not a cop. I fly the airplane, carry the bodies from point A to point B, and that's all. Problems like Indelicato are Dennehy's job, and he'd blown it. As he looked at his wife, he felt a dead, dry tightness in his guts. What'll happen now? What are these guys waiting for?

He raised his voice with bravado he did not feel. "Hey, I did my part of the deal. You promised to turn Suzanne loose. So how about it?"

Indelicato grinned, teeth bright white in his swarthy, stubbly face. "Oh, yeah," he said lazily. He glanced past the dirty drape, then looked back. "It's almost daylight. Go ahead, Sammy, take care of little Suzanne there."

Sammy, a barrelchested man with stubbly gray hair and a

nose the shape of a fist, walked over to Suzanne, took her under the arm, and hoisted her. Jackson, mouth dry, rose with her. "Wait a minute!" He felt Sammy close behind him, and a cool circumference of pistol muzzle pressed against his neck. Sammy dragged Suzanne away from him toward the narrow hallway at the back of the motel room, and she kicked and swore and hissed, all to no avail. Jackson stood frozen, watching helplessly—

And then something pounded against the back door, slowly, deliberately, hideously loud.

Stump Jackson was ludicrously reminded of the old "statue" game as everyone in the room went cardboard-cut-out still. No further sound issued from the back door. Indelicato broke the silence. "I got the kid covered, Virgil. Go check it."

Virgil stomped past Sammy and Suzanne toward the back door, his chrome pistol held tightly against his hard-packed belly. Back glued to the hallway wall, he opened the steel fire door very, very slowly. Streetlights, the brightening purple sky, and the shabby buildings of south Amherstburg showed, but nothing else.

Virgil glanced back at Indelicato, who must have

nodded—Jackson was facing away from him—pushed the screen door open with his pistol barrel, looked warily both ways, and stepped out.

The sound that followed could have been a duffel loaded with bowling balls rolling down a short, carpeted stairway. Then, silence. The mildewed air in the motel room seemed so charged that Jackson could almost feel the hairs rise on his thin arms. Sammy, still holding Suzanne, started for the door, but Indelicato whispered, "No!"

Then Virgil reappeared at the door. He was bent and panting, one eye bloody and shut, an earlobe twisted tight in the fingers of Dick Dennehy, who held a wicked black Colt Python against his neck.

With his gun hand, Dennehy opened the screen and dollied Virgil in. He looked at the group over Virgil's shoulder. "All right," he said conversationally.

Jackson didn't think so. He envisioned flame-engulfed muzzles, the sledgehammer-hard slam of slugs, Suzanne's screams. Sammy glanced at Indelicato quickly, jaw clenched. "You said he *drank* it!"

Indelicato's voice was low, oily, measured. "So what now, cop?"

Dennehy said, "Kick her loose

and I'll kick him loose and we turn our backs and walk."

"You first," Indelicato said.

Dennehy didn't answer. He gave Virgil a hard shove and the big man sprawled on the soiled carpet, scrambled on all fours, rose, and lumbered to Indelicato. Dennehy had his Python in both hands now, pointed at the group in general. "Over here, kid!" he snapped.

Stump Jackson stood shakily, turned, and backed past Sammy and Suzanne toward Dennehy. "Come on, Suze," he croaked.

Indelicato, pointing his pistol at them, opened the front door. Sammy dragged Suzanne back quickly and through the door, followed by Virgil. Stump Jackson moved his mouth silently and gave Dennehy a desperate, pleading look. Dennehy shook his head somberly.

Indelicato half-grinned, half-sneered, and gestured with his pistol. "We'll just take our little insurance policy along." Outside, car doors sounded and the mini-van motor fired up. "Once we get some ground between us and you, we'll drop her off." He started through the door, but first looked back and grinned. "Don't know how you did it, but nice move, cop." He strolled out; and a moment later the mini-van roared away.

**S**tump Jackson whirled and threw a roundhouse right toward Dennehy's face. With a practiced move, the policeman took it on a hard, meaty shoulder, grabbed Jackson's arm in a firm yet gentle hand, and pushed the pilot down onto the divan. "Cool your jets, flyboy," he grunted, holstering his Python under his coat.

Jackson blinked through tears. "You let them take her! Miserable stinkin' flatfoot cop!"

"Didn't see that I had much choice, boy." Jackson jumped to his feet again, fists clenched. Dennehy backed up a step, arms half-raised. "C'mon, son," he said gently. "You been through a lot of stress tonight, I don't want to have to kick your ass on top of it all, okay?"

"You could have had the cops surround the place!" Jackson screamed. "You could have caught 'em all! We'd be safe now!"

"But I didn't *want* to catch 'em. Not yet." Dennehy lighted a wrinkled Lucky straight-end with a battered Zippo lighter and exhaled a funnel of gray.

Jackson got his panting under control, wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, and squinted at Dennehy. The policeman still reeked of liquor; his cheap gray suit was crease-

less and damp, and his lower lip was freshly scabbed. Jackson asked, "Why aren't you dead?"

"Oh, thirsty as I was, I didn't drink that booze," Dennehy grinned. "Gave you guys a profile and dumped it down my neck under my coat collar. Old trick." He turned and demonstrated, hoisting an imaginary bottle in his hand, throat bobbing.

"You suspected the booze was poisoned."

"Something like that."

"But—your mouth was bloody," Jackson said weakly. "I was sure you were dead."

"Bit my lip. Held my breath. Realism is everything in this work, stringbean."

Jackson watched Dennehy smoke calmly, then asked, "What do you mean, you didn't want to catch them yet?"

"Come on." Dennehy led Jackson out the back door of the motel. The sky was brightening rapidly, the city noises gaining with the rising morning around them. An ancient, half-rusted, black Chevrolet pickup truck stood parked next to a row of overflowing dumpsters. "Hop in," Dennehy told Jackson.

Dennehy got behind the wheel and popped open the catches of his briefcase. Jackson slammed the door, sitting tensely on the hard, cracked, leather seat.

"Where'd you get this?"

"Stole it after I got out of the plane," Dennehy answered, poking through the case.

"How'd you find us?"

Dennehy held up a small gray box that looked like an alien transistor radio. At the flick of a switch, a couple of lights blinked on, a digital readout blazed, a faint hum sounded. "Had our friend Frankie bugged."

Jackson grinned unwillingly. "How could you do that without his knowing?"

"Homer was built into one of his shoes. They were state-issued, you know. Battery in it's nearly dead now, though." Dennehy flicked a switch and a much louder hum sounded. "But I planted a homer on the minivan before I busted in there just now." He looked at the dials and the lights. "Headed north," he muttered. He set the box down, reached under the steel dash of the truck, monkeyed with the wires, and the truck motor ground and fired. He gave Jackson a fierce grin. "Not bad for a miserable stinkin' flatfoot cop, huh? Shall we go?"

**F**or Stump Jackson, still deeply worried about his wife, it was a slow, tense business as Dennehy drove north through Amherst-

burg, the old pickup lurching from the policeman's inexperienced clutch work. Jackson, a native of the town, navigated, responding to Dennehy's interpretation of the homing device's lights, dials, and hum.

They broke out of the north end of town in the bright hot morning sun, drove quickly through the rolling, wooded hills of the luxurious River Highlands suburb, and entered the desolate limestone quarry district. Jackson knew that most of the quarries were abandoned now, and the rocky, wooded land was wholly unsuited for farming, so there wasn't much in the way of population up here. Damn good place to hide, Jackson thought. Damn good place to plant a body.

They had crested a steep hill on a narrow, unidentified, seldom-traveled westbound gravel road when Dennehy hit the clutch and let the ancient pickup roll to a halt. He eyeballed the humming monitor, reached under the dash, and killed the motor. "We're pretty close now. Half a mile at the most."

The woods waited around them in cool silence. Jackson whispered, "Which way?"

Dennehy pointed to the northwest. Shutting off the audio on the monitor, he picked it up and shoved his door open

with a loud creak. "Quietly, now."

They trudged through the dense, damp, dark virgin woods. The footing was treacherous in the deep, vine-entwined humus, and occasionally the men tripped over hidden limestone spurs. Dennehy occasionally consulted the dials on the silent monitor and altered their course. Finally he silently waved a halt and pointed straight ahead. Jackson could see a break in the woods and a long clear space ahead, floored with some kind of limestone cropping.

They crept up to it. It was the edge of a large, abandoned, water-filled quarry. The sun blazed brightly on the crystal blue water, which reflected up like highly polished glass. All around the quarry was solid, lichen-encrusted limestone standing twenty feet or so above the surface of the water. On the opposing cliff, at a bit of an angle from Dennehy and Jackson, were four people: Sammy, Virgil, Indelicato, and Suzanne. They stood at the same base of a much higher, gray limestone cliff. Sammy and Virgil were shirtless, grunting and panting as they unplied a great mass of boulders, one at a time, from the base of the cliff. Indelicato stood to the side watching them. Suzanne had her back against

the base of the cliff, staring down at her tightly clasped hands.

"She looks all right," Jackson whispered. "But how do we get 'em without hurting Suzanne?"

Dick Dennehy studied the situation for a moment. They could hear the pants and curses of the men echoing off the water and the limestone walls of the quarry as they pulled and hoisted at the boulders. Dennehy took Jackson's arm and grinned. "This is perfect. Here's what we do." He whispered instructions to Jackson.

Stump looked at the policeman incredulously. "You got to be kidding."

"Just do it."

"How do you know it's *deep* enough?"

"Little suspense is good for you."

"That's my *wife* out there, you son of a bitch!"

"And that's three heavy *revolvers* they've got there, you son of a bitch! This is your best chance! Go for it!"

Like a man starting the walk to the death chamber, Stump Jackson stepped out on the limestone outcropping in clear view of the men across the water. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "SU-ZANNE!"

The echo answered: SU-



ZANNE SUZAnne Suzanne  
suzanne suza

**I**n the ten previous hours, Suzanne Jackson had been fed through an emotional meatgrinder: terror at her abduction; boredom mixed with apprehension during her long wait with Virgil and Sammy in the motel; relief on Stump's arrival; panic, when Sammy dragged her away from Stump, apparently to kill her; fury when the big gray-suited stranger (what was he, a cop or what?) let them take her again. Now, watching the three hoods dig through the cairn of limestone boulders for the loot—for that's what it was, half a million in cash, they said—she felt drained and numb and resigned, all the fight gone. Or so she thought, till she heard Stump call her.

She straightened abruptly and looked and saw her husband, alone in the sunlight, standing across the water on the out-cropping.

The three hoods froze, spun, and stared at Jackson. Virgil said, "How the *hell*?" Indelicato pulled his revolver from his belt, eyes slitted like a snake. Sammy lost control of a heavy boulder he was carrying and it dropped onto his feet, making him shriek with pain and buckle at the knees.

Jackson yelled, "JUMP!"

Suzanne glanced back at Indelicato. He raised his heavy revolver in both hands, its sightless eye trained on Suzanne's face. And then something beautifully terrible happened.

A sound issued from Indelicato's feet, a short, snapping shriek like a sheet of aluminum being ripped in half, followed a long, loud hiss. Reddish white smoke billowed up, engulfing Indelicato. He lost his footing as if he had been yanked by his neck, and staggered back against the limestone wall, the revolver clattering away. Sammy and Virgil stared transfixed at him, and Suzanne, instinctively understanding, took three long graceful steps and dived.

It looked like a wall of rock rising to her, but it was only the surface of the water, and she cut it cleanly, plunging deep. Suzanne was a trained dancer and avid swimmer who worked out every day and was in excellent condition, and she swam hard with long strokes, keeping herself deep, trying hard to see in the ice-cold bluish-green water, till her air ran out, and she curved up to break the surface.

The sound of a gunshot echoed off the old quarry walls. Su-

zanne shook her head and looked back. Indelicato was down, twitching, barely visible. Virgil was flat against the limestone wall, staring curiously down at his bloody shirt. Sammy, on his knees and head down, had his hands raised in the air and was screaming something. She looked forward to see the big gray-suited man lowering his pistol. Just above her, on the lowest limestone shelf to which he'd apparently descended while she was diving, was her husband, his long strong arm reached down to help her, tear trails showing on his haunted face.

**D**ick Dennehy leaned against the counter in the Fly-Us office, drew on his Lucky, and said, "You know the dye bombs they sometimes use on bank robbers? This was a version of that—with some tear gas included, just for laughsies—we built into Frankie's other shoe. Triggered from my transmitter."

"So," Suzanne said, "you knew in advance about the plan to break Indelicato loose." She glanced anxiously at Stump, who sat in a bony slouch on a stool next to the counter, staring with frozen eyes at the floor.

"We had a tip," Dennehy said.

"Didn't know how it was going to go down. Had to play it by ear. But we arranged for shoes with the homer and bomb built in, just to give us an edge."

"Cute!" Jackson spat. He stared hotly at Dennehy, the face of his skin pale and tight, dark circles around his eyes. "You play with your James Bond toys, and meanwhile Suzanne could have been killed!"

Dennehy impassively crushed out his cigarette on the linoleum counter. "Let me clue you in on something, kid. This Frankie here, with his boys, is a prime suspect in an armored car robbery that happened in Benton Harbor a month or so before he went to prison on an unrelated charge. We didn't have enough evidence to charge him, and hadn't caught the other two suspects—Virgil and Sammy. We deliberately let him escape from the prison farm. We wanted him to lead us to the loot and to his accomplices."

Suzanne asked, "Then why did the police here catch him?"

Dennehy shrugged. "Bureaucratic mixup. His name was on the wire, but the people down here didn't know the fix was in. We thought we were blown, then we got the tip on the breakout attempt. Couldn't get a line on the plan, though. So I had to wing it."

Dennehy turned slowly and looked very hard at Jackson. "Thing of it is, kid: during the armored car robbery, Frankie and his boys blew away two police officers. That's something we don't like to see happen. Maybe you don't care for my methods, but I meant to get them all, plus the loot, and I didn't give a damn how."

"Besides, Stump," Suzanne murmured, making a dry swallow, "if it hadn't been for Inspector Dennehy, both of us would certainly have been killed."

Another pilot swaggered into the office. "Bird's ready when you are, inspector," he called.

Stump Jackson looked from his wife to the inspector, then back again, and rose.

"Hey, Bud, let me take this one?"

The pilot said, "Well, hell, Stump, after what you been through—"

"I'm a pilot," Jackson said. "I want to fly this bird. Okay?"

"Whatever you say." Bud handed Jackson a packed clipboard and left the room.

Jackson hugged his wife hard. "Back tonight." He walked past Dennehy: "Let's saddle up, inspector." Halfway to the office door he stopped and looked down. Frank Indelicato sat stiff and uncomfortable in one of the chrome lounge chairs. His jeans and shirt were stained red, and the left leg of his jeans was slit up to the knee, showing gauze bandages wrapped around down to the end of his shoeless foot. He stared through dark, glazed eyes at the pilot, face expressionless.

Jackson said: "Thank you for selecting Fly-Us Airlines. We hope you have a pleasant trip." He glanced at the top form on the clipboard, pursed his lips, and shook his head. "Oo. Looks like a lot of choppy air between here and Detroit. But chin up, Frankie. I'll make your trip as comfortable as possible. Trust me."

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# Miss Bracegirdle Does Her Duty

by Stacy  
Aumonier

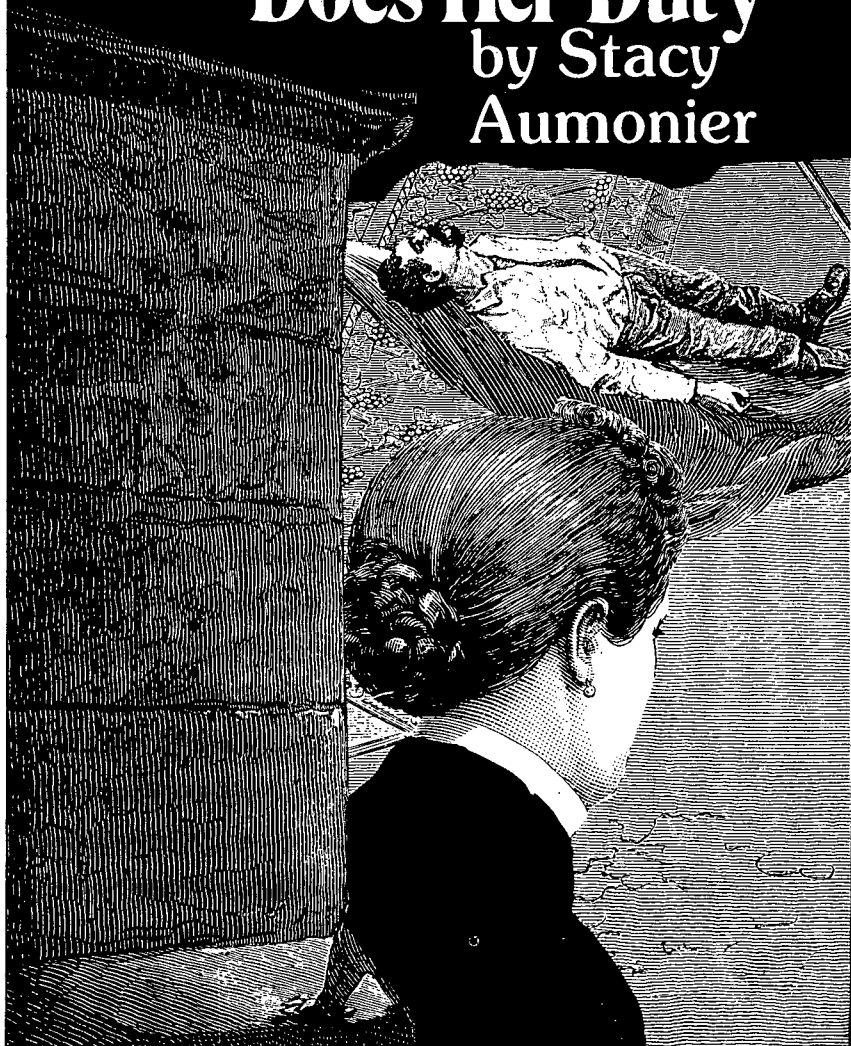


Illustration by Marc Yankus

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“**T**his is the room, madame.”  
“Ah, thank you—thank you.”  
“Does it appear satisfactory to madame?”

“Oh, yes. Thank you—quite.”

“Does madame require anything further?”

“Er—if not too late, may I have a hot bath?”

“*Parfaitement*, madame. The bathroom is at the end of the passage on the left. I will go and prepare it for madame.”

“There is one thing more. I have had a very long journey. I am very tired. Will you please see that I am not disturbed in the morning until I ring?”

“Certainly, madame.”

Millicent Bracegirdle was speaking the truth—she *was* tired. But then, in the sleepy cathedral town of Easingstoke, from which she came, it was customary for everyone to speak the truth. It was customary, moreover, for everyone to lead simple, self-denying lives—to give up their time to good works and elevating thoughts. One had only to glance at little Miss Bracegirdle to see that in her were epitomized all the virtues and ideals of Easingstoke. Indeed, it was the pursuit of duty which had brought her to the Hôtel de l'Ouest at Bordeaux on this summer's night. She had travelled from Easingstoke to London, then without a break to Dover, crossed that horrid stretch of sea to Calais, entrained for Paris, where of necessity she had to spend four hours—a terrifying experience—and then had come on to Bordeaux, arriving at midnight. The reason of this journey being that someone had to come to Bordeaux to meet her young sister-in-law, who was arriving the next day from South America. The sister-in-law was married to a missionary in Paraguay, but the climate's not agreeing with her, she was returning to England. Her dear brother, the dean, would have come himself, but the claims on his time were so extensive, the parishioners would miss him so—it was clearly Millicent's duty to go.

She had never been out of England before, and she had a horror of travel, and an ingrained distrust of foreigners. She spoke a little French, sufficient for the purpose of travel and for obtaining any modest necessities, but not sufficient for carrying on any kind of conversation. She did not deplore this latter fact, for she was of opinion that French people were not the kind of people that one would naturally want to have conversation with; broadly speaking, they were not quite “nice,” in spite of their ingratiating manners.

She unpacked her valise, placed her things about the room, tried

to thrust back the little stabs of homesickness as she visualized her darling room at the deanery. How strange and hard and unfriendly seemed these foreign hotel bedrooms! No chintz and lavender and photographs of all the dear family, the dean, the nephews and nieces, the interior of the cathedral during harvest festival; no samplers and needlework or colored reproductions of the paintings by Marcus Stone. Oh, dear, how foolish she was! What *did* she expect?

She disrobed, and donned a dressing gown; then, armed with a sponge bag and towel, she crept timidly down the passage to the bathroom, after closing her bedroom door and turning out the light. The gay bathroom cheered her. She wallowed luxuriously in the hot water, regarding her slim legs with quiet satisfaction. And for the first time since leaving home there came to her a pleasant moment, a sense of enjoyment in her adventure. After all, it *was* rather an adventure, and her life had been peculiarly devoid of it. What queer lives some people must live, traveling about, having experiences! How old was she? Not really old—not by any means. Forty-two? Forty-three? She had shut herself up so. She hardly ever regarded the potentialities of age. As the world went, she was a well-preserved woman for her age. A life of self-abnegation, simple living, healthy walking, and fresh air had kept her younger than these hurrying, pampered, city people.

Love? Yes, once when she was a young girl—he was a school-master, a most estimable, kind gentleman. They were never engaged—not actually, but it was a kind of understood thing. For three years it went on, this pleasant understanding and friendship. He was so gentle, so distinguished and considerate. She would have been happy to have continued in this strain for ever. But there was something lacking—Stephen had curious restless lapses. From the physical aspect of marriage she shrank—yes, even with Stephen, who was gentleness and kindness itself. And then, one day—one day he went away, vanished, and never returned. They told her he had married one of the country girls, a girl who used to work in Mrs. Forbes's dairy—not a very nice girl, she feared, one of those fast, pretty, foolish women. Heigho! Well, she had lived that down, destructive as the blow appeared at the time. One lives everything down in time. There is always work, living for others, faith, duty. At the same time she could sympathize with people who found satisfaction in unusual experiences. There would be lots to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him on the morrow: nearly losing her

spectacles on the restaurant car; the amusing remarks of an American child on the train to Paris; the curious food everywhere, nothing simple and plain; the two English ladies at the hotel in Paris who told her about the death of their uncle—the poor man being taken ill on Friday and dying on Sunday afternoon, just before tea time; the kindness of the hotel proprietor, who had sat up for her; the prettiness of the chambermaid. Oh, yes, everyone was really very kind. The French people, after all, were very nice. She had seen nothing—nothing but what was quite nice and decorous. There would be lots to tell the dean tomorrow.

Her body glowed with the friction of the towel. She again donned her night attire and her thick woollen dressing gown. She tidied up the bathroom carefully in exactly the same way she was accustomed to do at home; then once more gripped her sponge bag and towel, and turning out the light she crept down the passage to her room. Entering the room, she switched on the light and shut the door quickly. Then one of those ridiculous things happened, just the kind of thing you would expect to happen in a foreign hotel. The handle of the door came off in her hand. She ejaculated a quiet "Bother!" and sought to replace it with one hand, the other being occupied with the towel and sponge bag. In doing this she behaved foolishly, for, thrusting the knob carelessly against the steel pin without properly securing it, she only succeeded in pushing the pin farther into the door, and the knob was not adjusted. She uttered another little "Bother!" and put her sponge bag and towel down on the floor. She then tried to recover the pin with her left hand, but it had gone in too far.

"How very foolish!" she thought. "I shall have to ring for the chambermaid—and perhaps the poor girl has gone to bed."

She turned and faced the room, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her.

*There was a man asleep in her bed!*

The sight of that swarthy face on the pillow, with its black tousled hair and heavy mustache, produced in her the most terrible moment of her life. Her heart nearly stopped. For some seconds she could neither think nor scream, and her first thought was:

"I mustn't scream!"

She stood there like one paralyzed, staring at the man's head and the great curved hunch of his body under the clothes. When she began to think she thought very quickly and all her thoughts worked together. The first vivid realization was that it wasn't the



man's fault; it was *her* fault. *She was in the wrong room.* It was the man's room. The rooms were identical, but there were all his things about, his clothes thrown carelessly over chairs, his collar and tie on the wardrobe, his great heavy boots and the strange yellow trunk. She must get out—somehow, anyhow. She clutched once more at the door, feverishly driving her fingernails into the hole where the elusive pin had vanished. She tried to force her fingers in the crack and open the door that way, but it was of no avail. She was to all intents and purposes locked in—locked in a bedroom in a strange hotel, alone with a man—a foreigner—a *Frenchman!*

She must think—she must think! She switched off the light. If the light was off he might not wake up. It might give her time to think how to act. It was surprising that he had not awakened. If he *did* wake up, what would he do? How could she explain herself? He wouldn't believe her. No one would believe her. In an English hotel it would be difficult enough, but here, where she wasn't known, where they were all foreigners and consequently antagonistic—merciful heavens!

She *must* get out. Should she wake the man? No, she couldn't do that. He might murder her. He might—oh, it was too awful to contemplate! Should she scream? Ring for the chambermaid? But no; it would be the same thing. People would come rushing. They would find her there in the strange man's bedroom after midnight—she, Millicent Bracegirdle, sister of the dean of Eastingstoke! Easingstoke! Visions of Easingstoke flashed through her alarmed mind. Visions of the news arriving, women whispering around tea tables: "Have you heard, my dear? Really no one would have imagined! Her poor brother! He will, of course, have to resign, you know, my dear. Have a little more cream, my love."

Would they put her in prison? She might be in the room for the purpose of stealing or she might be in the room for the purpose of breaking every one of the ten commandments. There was no explaining it away. She was a ruined woman, suddenly and irretrievably, unless she could open the door. The chimney? Should she climb up the chimney? But where would that lead to? And then she thought of the man pulling her down by the legs when she was already smothered in soot. Any moment he might wake up. She thought she heard the chambermaid going along the passage. If she had wanted to scream, she ought to have screamed before. The maid would know she had left the bathroom some minutes ago.

Was she going to her room?

An abrupt and desperate plan formed in her mind. It was already getting on for one o'clock. The man was probably a quite harmless commercial traveler or businessman. He would probably get up about seven or eight o'clock, dress quickly, and go out. She would hide under his bed until he went. Only a matter of a few hours. Men don't look under their beds, although she made a religious practice of doing so herself. When he went he would be sure to open the door all right. The handle would be lying on the floor as though it had dropped off in the night. He would probably ring for the chambermaid, or open it with a penknife. Men are so clever at those things. When he had gone she would creep out and steal back to her room, and then there would be no necessity to give any explanation to anyone. But heavens! what an experience! Once under the white frill of that bed, she would be safe until the morning. In daylight nothing seemed so terrifying. With feline precaution she went down on her hands and knees and crept towards the bed. What a lucky thing there was that broad white frill! She lifted it at the foot of the bed and crept under. There was just sufficient depth to take her slim body. The floor was fortunately carpeted all over, but it seemed very close and dusty. Suppose she coughed or sneezed! Anything might happen. Of course, it would be much more difficult to explain her presence under the bed than to explain her presence just inside the door. She held her breath in suspense. No sound came from above, but under the frill it was difficult to hear anything. It was almost more nerve-racking than hearing everything—listening for signs and portents. This temporary escape, in any case, would give her time to regard the predicament detachedly. Up to the present she had not been able to focus the full significance of her action. She had, in truth, lost her head. She had been like a wild animal, consumed with the sole idea of escape—a mouse or a cat would do this kind of thing—take cover and lie low. If only it hadn't all happened *abroad*!

She tried to frame sentences of explanation in French, but French escaped her. And then they talked so rapidly, these people. They didn't listen. The situation was intolerable. Would she be able to endure a night of it? At present she was not altogether uncomfortable, only stuffy and—very, very frightened. But she had to face six or seven or eight hours of it, and perhaps even then discovery in the end! The minutes flashed by as she turned the matter over and over in her head. There was no solution. She began to

wish she had screamed or awakened the man. She saw now that that would have been the wisest and most politic thing to do; but she had allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to elapse from the moment when the chambermaid would know that she had left the bathroom. They would want an explanation of what she had been doing in the man's bedroom all that time. Why hadn't she screamed before?

She lifted the frill an inch or two and listened. She thought she heard the man breathing, but she couldn't be sure. In any case, it gave her more air. She became a little bolder, and thrust her face partly through the frill so that she could breathe freely. She tried to steady her nerves by concentrating on the fact that—well. There it was. She had done it. She must make the best of it. Perhaps it would be all right, after all.

"Of course, I shan't sleep," she kept on thinking. "I shan't be able to. In any case, it will be safer not to sleep. I must be on the watch."

She set her teeth and waited grimly. Now that she had made up her mind to see the thing through in this manner she felt a little calmer. She almost smiled as she reflected that there would certainly be something to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him tomorrow. How would he take it? Of course he would believe it—he had never doubted a single word that she had uttered in her life—but the story would sound so preposterous. In Easingstoke it would be almost impossible to imagine such an experience. She, Millicent Bracegirdle, spending a night under a strange man's bed in a foreign hotel! What would those women think? Fanny Shields and that garrulous old Mrs. Rusbridger? Perhaps—yes, perhaps it would be advisable to tell the dear dean to let the story go no further. One could hardly expect Mrs. Rusbridger to not make implications—exaggerate. Oh, dear! what were they all doing now? They would all be asleep; everyone in Easingstoke. Her dear brother always retired at ten fifteen. He would be sleeping calmly and placidly, the sleep of the just—breathing the clear sweet air of Sussex, not this—oh, it *was* stuffy! She felt a great desire to cough. She mustn't do that.

Yes, at nine thirty all the servants were summoned to the library. There was a short service—never more than fifteen minutes; her brother didn't believe in a great deal of ritual—then at ten o'clock cocoa for everyone. At ten fifteen bed for everyone. The dear, sweet bedroom, with the narrow white bed, by the side of which she had knelt every night so long as she could remember—even in her dear

mother's day—and said her prayers.

Prayers! Yes, that was a curious thing. This was the first night in her life experience when she had not said her prayers on retiring. The situation was certainly very peculiar—exceptional, you might call it. God would understand and forgive such a lapse. And yet, after all, why—what was to prevent her saying her prayers? Of course, she couldn't kneel in the proper devotional attitude, that would be a physical impossibility; nevertheless, perhaps her prayers might be just as efficacious—if they came from the heart.

So little Miss Bracegirdle curved her body and placed her hands in a devout attitude in front of her face, and quite inaudibly murmured her prayers under the strange man's bed.

At the end she added, fervently:

"Please God protect me from the dangers and perils of this night."

Then she lay silent and inert, strangely soothed by the effort of praying.

It began to get very uncomfortable, stuffy, but at the same time drafty, and the floor was getting harder every minute. She changed her position stealthily and controlled her desire to cough. Her heart was beating rapidly. Over and over again recurred the vivid impression of every little incident and argument that had occurred to her from the moment she left the bathroom. This must, of course, be the room next to her own. So confusing, with perhaps twenty bedrooms all exactly alike on one side of a passage—how was one to remember whether one's number was one hundred and fifteen or one hundred and sixteen? Her mind began to wander idly off into her schooldays. She was always very bad at figures. She disliked Euclid and all those subjects about angles and equations—so unimportant, not leading anywhere. History she liked, and botany, and reading about strange foreign lands, although she had always been too timid to visit them. And the lives of great people, *most* fascinating—Oliver Cromwell, Lord Beaconsfield, Lincoln, Grace Darling—*there* was a heroine for you—General Booth, a great, good man, even if a little vulgar. She remembered dear old Miss Trimings talking about him one afternoon at the vicar of St. Bride's garden party. She was so amusing. She— *Good heavens!*

*Almost unwittingly Millicent Bracegirdle had emitted a violent sneeze!*

It was finished! For the second time that night she was conscious of her heart nearly stopping. For the second time that night she was so paralyzed with fear that her mentality went to pieces. Now

she would hear the man get out of bed. He would walk across to the door, switch on the light, and then lift up the frill. She could almost see that fierce mustachioed face glaring at her and growling something in French. Then he would thrust out an arm and drag her out. And then? Oh God in heaven! what then?

"I shall scream before he does it. Perhaps I had better scream now. If he drags me out he will clap his hand over my mouth. Perhaps chloroform—"

But somehow she could not scream. She was too frightened even for that. She lifted the frill and listened. Was he moving stealthily across the carpet? She thought—no, she couldn't be sure. Anything might be happening. He might strike her from above—with one of those heavy boots, perhaps. Nothing seemed to be happening, but the suspense was intolerable. She realized now that she hadn't the power to endure a night of it. Anything would be better than this—disgrace, imprisonment, even death. She would crawl out, wake the man, and try to explain as best she could.

She would switch on the light, cough, and say: "Monsieur!"

Then he would start up and stare at her.

Then she would say—what should she say?

"*Pardon, monsieur, mais je—*" What on earth was the French for "I have made a mistake"?

"*J'ai tort. C'est la chambre—er—incorrect. Voulez-vous—er—?*"

What was the French for "doorknob," "let me go"?

It didn't matter. She would turn on the light, cough, and trust to luck. If he got out of bed and came towards her, she would scream the hotel down.

The resolution formed, she crawled deliberately out at the foot of the bed. She scrambled hastily towards the door—a perilous journey. In a few seconds the room was flooded with light. She turned towards the bed, coughed, and cried out boldly:

"Monsieur!"

Then for the third time that night little Miss Bracegirdle's heart all but stopped. In this case the climax of the horror took longer to develop, but when it was reached it clouded the other two experiences into insignificance.

*The man on the bed was dead!*

She had never beheld death before, but one does not mistake death.

She stared at him, bewildered, and repeated almost in a whisper: "Monsieur! Monsieur!"

Then she tiptoed towards the bed. The hair and mustache looked extraordinarily black in that grey, wax-like setting. The mouth was slightly open, and the face, which in life might have been vicious and sensual, looked incredibly peaceful and far away. It was as though she were regarding the features of a man across some vast passage of time, a being who had always been completely remote from mundane preoccupations.

When the full truth came home to her, little Miss Bracegirdle buried her face in her hands and murmured:

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!"

For the moment her own position seemed an affair of small consequence. She was in the presence of something greater and more all-pervading. Almost instinctively she knelt by the bed and prayed.

For a few moments she seemed to be possessed by an extraordinary calmness and detachment. The burden of her hotel predicament was a gossamer trouble—a silly, trivial, almost comic episode; something that could be explained away.

But this man—he had lived his life, whatever it was like, and now he was in the presence of his Maker. What kind of man had he been?

Her meditations were broken by an abrupt sound. It was that of a pair of heavy boots being thrown down by the door outside. She started, thinking at first it was someone knocking or trying to get in. She heard the "boots," however, stumping away down the corridor, and the realization stabbed her with the truth of her own position. She mustn't stop there. The necessity to get out was even more urgent.

To be found in a strange man's bedroom in the night is bad enough, but to be found in a dead man's bedroom was even worse. They would accuse her of murder, perhaps. Yes, that would be it—how could she possibly explain to these foreigners? Good God! they would hang her. No, guillotine her—that's what they do in France. They would chop her head off with a great steel knife. Merciful heavens! She envisaged herself standing blindfold, by a priest and an executioner in a red cap, like that man in the Dickens story. What was his name?—Sydney Carton, that was it. And before he went on the scaffold he said:

"'It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done—'"

But no, she couldn't say that. It would be a far, far worse thing that she did. What about the dear dean; her sister-in-law arriving

alone from Paraguay tomorrow; all her dear people and friends in Easingstoke; her darling Tony, the large grey tabby cat? It was her duty not to have her head chopped off if it could possibly be avoided. She could do no good in the room. She could not recall the dead to life. Her only mission was to escape. Any minute people might arrive. The chambermaid, the boots, the manager, the gendarmes. Visions of gendarmes arriving armed with swords and notebooks vitalized her almost exhausted energies. She was a desperate woman. Fortunately now she had not to worry about the light. She sprang once more at the door and tried to force it open with her fingers. The result hurt her and gave her pause. If she was to escape she must *think*, and think intensely. She mustn't do anything rash and silly; she must just think and plan calmly.

She examined the lock carefully. There was no keyhole, but there was a slip-bolt, so that the hotel guest could lock the door on the inside, but it couldn't be locked on the outside. Oh, why didn't this poor dear dead man lock his door last night? Then this trouble could not have happened. She could see the end of the steel pin. It was about half an inch down the hole. If anyone was passing they must surely notice the handle sticking out too far the other side! She drew a hairpin out of her hair and tried to coax the pin back, but she only succeeded in pushing it a little farther in. She felt the color leaving her face, and a strange feeling of faintness came over her.

She was fighting for her life; she mustn't give way. She darted round the room like an animal in a trap, her mind alert for the slightest crevice of escape. The window had no balcony, and there was a drop of five stories to the street below. Dawn was breaking. Soon the activities of the hotel and the city would begin. The thing must be accomplished before then.

She went back once more and stared hard at the lock. She stared at the dead man's property, his razors and brushes and writing materials. He appeared to have a lot of writing materials, pens and pencils and rubber and sealing wax. Sealing wax!

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. It is in any case quite certain that Millicent Bracegirdle, who had never invented a thing in her life, would never have evolved the ingenious little device she did, had she not believed that her position was utterly desperate. For in the end this is what she did. She got together a box of matches, a candle, a bar of sealing wax, and a hairpin. She made a little pool of hot sealing wax, into which she dipped the end of



the hairpin. Collecting a small blob on the end of it, she thrust it into the hole, and let it adhere to the end of the steel pin. At the seventh attempt she got the thing to move.

It took her just an hour and ten minutes to get that steel pin back into the room, and when at length it came far enough through for her to grip it with her fingernails, she burst into tears through the sheer physical tenseness of the strain. Very, very carefully she pulled it through, and holding it firmly with her left hand she fixed the knob with her right, then slowly turned it.

The door opened!

The temptation to dash out into the corridor and scream with relief was almost irresistible, but she forebore. She listened. She peeped out. No one was about. With beating heart she went out, closing the door inaudibly; she crept like a little mouse to the room next door, stole in, and flung herself on the bed. Immediately she did so, it flashed through her mind that *she had left her sponge bag and towel in the dead man's room!*

In looking back upon her experience she always considered that the second expedition was the worst of all. She might have let the sponge bag and towel remain there, only that the towel—she never used hotel towels—had neatly inscribed in the corner "M. B."

With furtive caution she managed to retrace her steps. She re-entered the dead man's room, reclaimed her property, and returned to her own. When the mission was accomplished she was indeed well-nigh spent. She lay on her bed and groaned feebly. At last she fell into a fevered sleep.

It was eleven o'clock when she awoke, and no one had been to disturb her. The sun was shining, and the experiences of the night appeared a dubious nightmare. Surely she had dreamt it all?

With dread still burning in her heart she rang the bell. After a short interval of time the chambermaid appeared. The girl's eyes were bright with some uncontrollable excitement. No, she had not been dreaming. This girl had heard something.

"Will you bring me some tea, please?"

"Certainly, madame."

The maid drew back the curtains and fussed about the room. She was under a pledge of secrecy, but she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she approached the bed and whispered, excitedly:

"Oh, madame, I am promised not to tell—but a terrible thing has happened! A man, a dead man, has been found in room one hundred and seventeen—a guest! Please not to say I tell you. But

they have all been here—the gendarmes, the doctors, the inspectors. Oh, it is terrible—terrible!”

The little lady in the bed said nothing. There was indeed nothing to say. But Marie Louise Lancret was too full of emotional excitement to spare her:

“But the terrible thing is— Do you know who he was, madame? They say it is Boldhu, the man wanted for the murder of Jeanne Carreton in the barn at Vincennes. They say he strangled her, and then cut her up in pieces and hid her in two barrels, which he threw into the river. Oh, but he was a bad man, madame, a terrible bad man—and he died in the room next door. Suicide, they think; or was it an attack of the heart? Remorse; some shock, perhaps. Did you say a *café complet*, madame?”

“No, thank you, my dear—just a cup of tea—strong tea.”

“*Parfaitement*, madame.”

The girl retired, and a little later a waiter entered the room with a tray of tea. She could never get over her surprise at this. It seemed so—well, indecorous for a man—although only a waiter—to enter a lady’s bedroom. There was, no doubt, a great deal in what the dear dean said. They were certainly very peculiar, these French people—they had most peculiar notions. It was not the way they behaved at Easingstoke. She got farther under the sheets, but the waiter appeared quite indifferent to the situation. He put the tray down and retired.

When he had gone, she sat up and sipped her tea, which gradually warmed her. She was glad the sun was shining. She would have to get up soon. They said that her sister-in-law’s boat was due to berth at one o’clock. That would give her time to dress comfortably, write to her brother, and then go down to the docks.

Poor man! So he had been a murderer, a man who cut up the bodies of his victims—and she had spent the night in his bedroom! They were certainly a most—how could she describe it?—people. Nevertheless she felt a little glad that at the end she had been there to kneel and pray by his bedside. Probably nobody else had ever done that. It was very difficult to judge people. Something at some time might have gone wrong. He might not have murdered the woman after all. People were often wrongly convicted. She herself. If the police had found her in that room at three o’clock that morning— It is that which takes place in the heart which counts. One learns and learns. Had she not learnt that one can pray just as effectively lying under a bed as kneeling beside it?

Poor man!

She washed and dressed herself and walked calmly down to the writing room. There was no evidence of excitement among the other hotel guests. Probably none of them knew about the tragedy except herself. She went to a writing table, and after profound meditation wrote as follows:

"My dear brother,—I arrived late last night, after a very pleasant journey. Everyone was very kind and attentive, the manager was sitting up for me. I nearly lost my spectacles in the restaurant car, but a kind old gentleman found them and returned them to me. There was a most amusing American child on the train. I will tell you about her on my return. The people are very pleasant, but the food is peculiar, nothing plain and wholesome. I am going down to meet Annie at one o'clock. How have you been keeping, my dear? I hope you have not had any further return of the bronchial attacks. Please tell Lizzie that I remembered in the train on the way here that that large stone jar of marmalade that Mrs. Hunt made is behind those empty tins on the top shelf of the cupboard next to the coachhouse. I wonder whether Mrs. Buller was able to come to evensong after all? This is a nice hotel, but I think Annie and I will stay at the Grand tonight, as the bedrooms here are rather noisy. Well, my dear, nothing more till I return. Do take care of yourself.

"Your loving sister,

"Millicent."

Yes, she couldn't tell Peter about it, neither in the letter nor when she went back to him. It was her duty not to tell him. It would only distress him: she felt convinced of it. In this curious foreign atmosphere the thing appeared possible, but in Easingstoke the mere recounting of the fantastic situation would be positively indelicate. There was no escaping that broad general fact—she had spent a night in a strange man's bedroom. Whether he was a gentleman or a criminal, even whether he was dead or alive, did not seem to mitigate the jar upon her sensibilities, or, rather, it would not mitigate the jar upon the peculiarly sensitive relationship between her brother and herself. To say that she had been to the bathroom, the knob of the door handle came off in her hand, she was too

frightened to awaken the sleeper or scream, she got under the bed—well, it was all perfectly true. Peter would believe her, but—one simply could not conceive such a situation in Easingstoke deanery. It would create a curious little barrier between them, as though she had been dipped in some mysterious solution which alienated her. It was her duty not to tell.

She put on her hat and went out to post the letter. She distrusted a hotel letterbox. One never knew who handled these letters. It was not a proper official way of treating them. She walked to the head post office in Bordeaux.

The sun was shining. It was very pleasant walking about amongst these queer, excitable people, so foreign and different looking—and the *cafés* already crowded with chattering men and women; and the flower stalls, and the strange odor of—what was it? salt? brine? charcoal? A military band was playing in the square—very gay and moving. It was all life, and movement, and bustle—thrilling rather.

"I spent a night in a strange man's bedroom."

Little Miss Bracegirdle hunched her shoulders, hummed to herself, and walked faster. She reached the post office, and found the large metal plate with the slot for letters and R.F. stamped above it. Something official at last! Her face was a little flushed—was it the warmth of the day, or the contact of movement and life?—as she put her letter into the slot. After posting it she put her hand into the slot and flicked it round to see that there were no foreign contraptions to impede its safe delivery. No, the letter had dropped safely in. She sighed contentedly, and walked off in the direction of the docks to meet her sister-in-law from Paraguay.

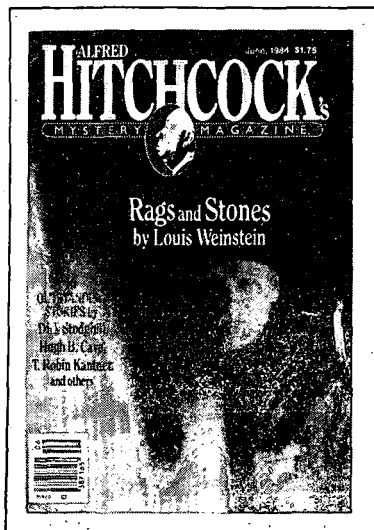
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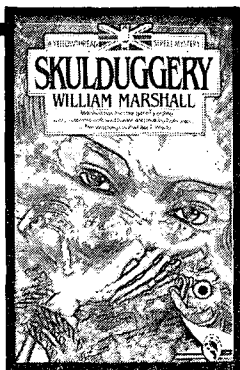
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# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



William Marshall's "Yellowthread Street Mystery" series is strong enough to transcend the genre; that is, it appeals to non-mystery readers as well as die-hard mystery fans. I make this claim based on a single—but, I feel confident, representative—example: my husband, whose first choice of reading matter is tome-sized nonfiction but who was persuaded to dip into *The Hatchet Man*. Without further encouragement he avidly consumed the other seven books in the series. If memory serves me correctly, only the Sjöwall-Wahlöö procedurals and Dorothy Dunnett's Johnson Johnson mysteries have thus captured his attention. Scientists might quibble with the

statistics I've used to support this observation, but I staunchly stand by my claim (and by my husband's superior taste in fiction). The "Yellowthread Street" books are exceptionally fine novels, worthy of any fiction-lover's consideration.

These are police procedurals with a difference, not the least of which is the setting. Hong Bay is a fictitious district of Hong Kong, "an island of some 30 square miles under British administration in the South China Sea." In each of the novels Marshall notes that the "Hong Bay district is on the southern side of the island and the tourist brochures advise you not to go there after dark." One can thus reasonably expect

Above, William Marshall's *Skulduggery*, published in paperback by Holt, Rinehart and Winston as part of their Owl Mystery Series.

a liberal and varied assortment of crimes in this area, and one will not be disappointed. The Hong Bay precinct house (located on Yellowthread Street, naturally) and its detectives have their work cut out for them.

Heading up the team of good guys is Chief Inspector Harry Feiffer, a native-born gent whose distinguishing features include his brains, his strong sense of duty, and the soiled white suit he habitually wears. (I assume it's the same white suit, rather than a closetful of identical, soiled suits.) His sidekick (and foil) is Christopher O'Yee, a Chinese-American with a quick wit and an Irishman's gift of gab. These two men are friends and close colleagues, a statement that cannot be applied to their two subordinates, Auden and Spencer. The latter are constantly at odds, with the older Auden forever baiting the more naive Spencer. Their partnership, as well as the antics of the several constables in the precinct, provides much of the humor in the books.

And these books are truly funny. Against the very violent crimes, such as lethal letter bombs (*Gelignite*), a series killer (*The Hatchet Man*), and a plane-load of poisoned airline pas-

sengers (*Thin Air*), the antics of the Yellowthread Street gang seem almost macabre. But Feiffer takes the classic role of straight man throughout the investigations, and our sympathies are with him. *Yellowthread Street* is the title of the series opener, and you will also want to look for *Skulduggery*, *Perfect End*, *The Far Away Man*, and *Sci Fi*. The latter is my favorite, a high-speed race to find a costumed spaceman who wields a raygun that can incinerate its victims. What makes the search piquant is that Hong Kong is hosting the annual All-Asia Science Fiction and Horror Movie Festival, and the city is overrun with partying monsters, space creatures, and assorted aliens and heroes.

Solid characters, snappy dialogue, engrossing plots, and a wicked sense of humor mark the mysteries in this series. Look for them in hardcover under the imprint of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, and the bulk of them, in paperback editions, under the banner of Holt's paperback line, The Owl Mystery Series. After you've enjoyed them, hang on to them. The next time you hear a friend claim, "I never read mysteries," pass along a William Marshall novel.

## MYSTERY REVIEWS

Good news for those of you who love Dorothy Dunnett's Johnson



Johnson mysteries. A new one has come out since I profiled Dunnett, and like the others, it has a "bird" in its title: **Dolly and the Bird of Paradise** (Alfred A. Knopf, \$14.95, 316 pp.). The "bird" in the title refers to the book's narrator/heroine, Rita Geddes, a punked-out makeup artist with her own special brand of irresistible charm, and the *Dolly* is, as always, JJ's beautiful yacht. It was published in hardcover months ago, and may now be available in a paperback edition.

There are also new titles from three other authors who have been featured in this column. Arthur Lyons' latest is **Three with a Bullet** (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$13.95, 240 pp.), in which L.A. detective Jacob Asch is hired by a powerful music promoter to learn who is sabotaging his business. The trail Jake follows is littered with drugs, seamy scenes of the rock music biz, soulless teenage groupies—and, of course, murder. As always, Jake struggles to maintain his own integrity against a sordid landscape of greedy thrill-seekers hungry for power. This is a tough, hard-hitting tale, not for the weak of stomach.

Second, there's a new Charles Paris mystery by British author Simon Brett. **Not Dead, Only Resting** (Charles Scribner's Sons, \$12.95, 176 pp.) takes its title from a theatrical term: "resting" is how an actor describes the hiatus between shows. In Paris's case, it means he's on unemployment, probably drinking too much, and wondering if he'll ever work again. So when two old acquaintances invite him to dinner, he accepts with alacrity, and that evening at the popular and expensive restaurant Tryst is a delight. Paris even finds the impromptu floor show—a lover's quarrel between the two homosexuals who own the establishment—so predictable that it merely makes the evening more memorable. Little does he guess that days later he'll employ his sleuthing powers to help one of his hosts solve the murder of one of Tryst's owners—and the disappearance of the other.

Finally, W. J. Burley's mysteries starring Wycliffe have also been the subject of a column. **The Schoolmaster**, though it isn't a Wycliffe mystery, is well worth your time. It's a contemporary psychological thriller with a Walter Mitty hero, a repressed schoolteacher named Arthur Milton. It's a wonderfully twisty tale that opens when Arthur's wife of twenty-two years leaves him for another man. The wife's lover is murdered, and although Milton is soon cleared of suspicion, the investigation rattles him: he quits his job and moves into a cheap boarding house, assuming a new identity. There he stumbles across reminders of his first girlfriend, who was

murdered twenty years ago, and he begins to investigate that old, unsolved crime. The story of Milton's struggle to regain his balance—and the suspense that builds around both the new and old murders—is a gripping one. (Walker British Mystery, \$2.95, 160 pp.)

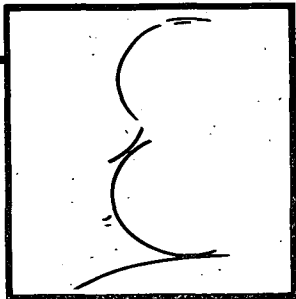
David L. Lindsey, author of *A Cold Mind*, has written another taut psychological detective story featuring police detective Stuart Haydon. In **Heat from Another Sun** Haydon is on a leave of absence, struggling with his own obsession with something that happened in his past; but the murder of a film technician in the darkroom of a prestigious ad agency prompts Haydon's colleagues to ask his assistance. It soon becomes apparent that violence for the sheer pleasure of it is at the core of the crime, and a strange, reclusive magnate is probably at the heart of the mystery. But there's a long way to go before solving it, and an even longer way to proving anything, and much of the suspense has to do with how well Haydon will hold up through it all. The plot may strike some as a bit implausible, but the characters—especially Haydon and his wife—are truly originals, and the tension undeniably builds to fever pitch. (Harper & Row, \$14.95, 296 pp.)

**The Gold Solution** by Herbert Resnicow introduces a fresh face (two faces, to be more exact) to the gallery of sleuths (Avon Books, \$2.75, 183 pp.). Alexander Gold might remind some of Nero Wolfe: both brilliant, both New Yorkers, both armchair sleuths (in Gold's case because he's recovering from a heart attack). He reminded *me* of "The Man Who Came to Dinner": a curmudgeon, with little patience for the stupidity of others, an oversized ego, and a rapier wit. Like these other two, Gold is a charmer and fun to watch. His wife, Norma, is his Archie, and together they try to solve a locked-room murder that threatens to convict the friend of a friend. This is breezy and fun.

I couldn't resist reading **The Other David**, a first novel that promised a colorful blend of mystery and the art world. I wasn't disappointed. Author Carolyn Coker has placed an attractive heroine—an art historian and restorer named Andrea Perkins—in the center of a twisty and suspenseful tale of greed and forgery. And as even the romance proves, not all "masterpieces" prove to be authentic, and all is definitely not what it may appear to be. (Dodd, Mead, \$13.95, 219 pp.)

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



A big reason for the success of **Beverly Hills Cop**, comedian Eddie Murphy's very funny box office hit, is that it has a solid police investigation underpinning. Murphy plays a Detroit police investigator who, just like any detective worth his salt out of thirties or forties movies, is in trouble with his superiors because of his unorthodox methods. After impersonating a cigarette smuggler so convincingly that he almost gets shot by the uniformed police, he does not hesitate to go out for a night on the town with an old friend whom he knows to be mixed up with criminals. The criminals come along at the end of the evening, knock Murphy senseless, and rub out his friend gangland-style. Because it doesn't look good for a policeman to be involved in such a matter, Murphy's super-

riors bar him from the case. He responds by taking his vacation time, promising to keep out of the affair but resolving to find the killers.

The youthful audiences crowding the theaters may not have noticed it, but this is a classic situation. His buddy killed, the hero—in bad odor with authority—sets out to solve the mystery on his own. Murphy goes to Beverly Hills, where his friend worked last, and there, again in classic fashion, he finds himself both at odds with the local police (he cannot work with them lest word of his intentions gets back to Detroit), and in danger from his friend's murderers. Throughout the movie Murphy is dressed not in a trenchcoat but in jeans, a gray school gymnasium T-shirt stamped "Mumford Phys. Ed. Dept.," a zipper-fronted, hooded sweatshirt, and black-striped



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Michael Chapman and Eddie Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop*.

white sneakers. But though his style is unorthodox, he consistently follows sound procedure.

Starting with his single lead—the posh art gallery where his dead friend worked—Murphy makes his way to the sinister, wealthy owner and finally to an international smuggling operation. Imported goods are placed inside the bonded area of a warehouse until they can be examined by the U.S. Customs Service. The smugglers break into and reseal crates in which they have shipped both legal goods, which they leave in place, and cocaine, which they take away. Murphy senses what is going on as soon as he sees that coffee is part of the shipments: cocaine packed within coffee grounds cannot be sniffed out by the trained dogs.

Impeding Murphy every step of the way are Taggart and Rosewood, two bumbling plainclothesmen who have been assigned to tail him. Before Taggart and Rosewood learn that he, too, is a cop, they haul him into headquarters. On the way Murphy remarks that they have the cleanest police car he has ever seen—"nicer than my apartment." He is taken to an imposing white building decorously set back from the street. He is addressed as "sir," even though he has done everything

to make himself seem like a drifter and a troublemaker. The workings of the Beverly Hills police are made into the stuff of comedy as Murphy's face registers the amazement of someone who has worked in the seamy conditions of Detroit.

Comic, too, but highly effective are the chameleon changes of character and the tall tales Murphy tells to get himself into forbidden places and out of tight spots. He lies so effectively to the Beverly Hills police brass that they never do figure out what has been going on.

In the end the Beverly Hills police do make their contribution, though the lieutenant in charge arrives with his men, like Inspector Lestrade, just in time to make the arrests and take care of the loose ends. The case has been a straightforward one, the complications having been provided by the obstacles placed in Murphy's way by the police and in the police's way by the elaborate laws governing search warrants. On the other hand, the plot has never strayed from the case, as it tends to do in other comedy-mysteries. Throughout Eddie Murphy's comic routines, his rapid-fire profanity, and the sound track's ever-present throb of break dance music, the viewer never loses sight of the serious police investigator doing his job in the best way he knows how.

# THE STORY THAT WON



The December Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Stuart Brynien of Brooklyn, New York. Honorable mentions go to Pamela J. Lobaugh of Redlands, California; Jennie Westlake of Kenmore, New York; Gail M. Upton of Rochester, Minnesota; William F. Smith of Garden Grove, California; Kim E. Nay of Noorvik, Alaska; W. F. Koehler of Maryland Heights, Missouri; Don Shaffer of San Mateo, California; Shirley Lawrence Steele of Grinnell, Iowa; James McDonell of Phoenix, Arizona; Douglas Ames of Battle Creek, Michigan; Brian McCullough of Kanata, Ontario, Canada; Milan Baldwin of Shawnee Hills, Ohio; Elizabeth Williams of Denver, Colorado; and Deborah Denice of Kingwood, Texas.

## THE MAN IN THE WAGON by Stuart Brynien

The indignity of it all! Traveling around in a makeshift wagon, after years of whisking about with such style, such old fashioned panache!

He sighed and snapped down hard on the reins, and the droopy old mare clip-clopped ahead a little faster. He heard his cargo bouncing around in the back—four lady mannequins and eleven hobby horses, held in by some frayed old rope.

That was an even bigger embarrassment. To think that he'd had to *steal* them! But what else could he do? Money was low; production costs were high. He'd had no other choice.

So he'd built the wagon, hitched up the horse (she was all he could find), disguised himself as best he could, and embarked upon his life as a thief. Darn good thing no one had seen him! But the children *would* like the horses; and his wife, dressmaker that she was, *would* welcome the mannequins.

The thought cheered him and soon his short, round frame was quivering with laughter; the deep, robust laugh that the Mrs. always said made everyone else laugh, too.

And it rang out over the wind, over the steady beat of the old mare's hooves on the hard-packed, frozen snow. She looked at him, ears pricked.

Good girl, he thought. You may not be much like my Dasher or Dancer—or even my Prancer or Vixen—but don't worry, you're doing just fine.

He gave the reins a little flip, and drove on through the night.

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\$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for \_\_\_\_\_ insertion(s) in the \_\_\_\_\_ issue(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Heading \_\_\_\_\_

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) \$35.25	(2) \$35.25	(3) \$35.25	(4) \$35.25	(5) \$35.25
(6) \$35.25	(7) \$35.25	(8) \$35.25	(9) \$35.25	(10) \$35.25
(11) \$35.25	(12) \$35.25	(13) \$35.25	(14) \$35.25	(15) \$35.25
(16) \$37.60	(17) \$39.95	(18) \$42.30	(19) \$44.65	(20) \$47.00
(21) \$49.35	(22) \$51.70	(23) \$54.05	(24) \$56.40	(25) \$58.75
(26) \$61.10	(27) \$63.45	(28) \$65.80	(29) \$68.15	(30) \$70.50

**HOW TO COUNT WORDS:** Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word; Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017; 7 WORDS; Zip codes are not counted; Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each; Garden City, New York; 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Foreign advertisers please remit payment in US funds via postal money order. **Please make checks payable to ALFRED HITCHCOCK MAGAZINE.**



# CLASSIFIED

# MARKET

AM-APR/85

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**ASSEMBLE OUR DEVICES** (Electronic) We send parts and pay for assembly. Beginners welcome. Write: Electronic Development Lab, Box 1560D, Pinellas Park, Florida 33565.

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**READ** "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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**FORTUNE-Building.** Huge profits; start your own wealth-producing business. Free details: Bowen, 800-8 W. Franklin St., Monroe, N.C. 28110.

**BUMPER STICKER PRINTING DEVICE.** Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free details: Bumper, POB 22791 (TW), Tampa, FL 33622.

**\$2000 In cash per week PLUS thousands of Dollars in Freebies Guaranteed!** Details: Essential, Dept. 12, 14 Berrywood, Huntington, New York 11743

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# PLACE

# CLASSIFIED

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MUSICAL Greeting cards. Every Occasion. 100% Guaranteed. Orient International, 111-35 75th Avenue, Forest Hills, N.Y. 11375. Telephone (718) 544-0598.

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## GIFTS THAT PLEASE

IRRESISTIBLE OPPORTUNITY. EXOTIC giftware for resale and personal use. Details \$3.00 (includes \$7.00 sample). Thompsons, Box 296A, Mukwonago, Wisconsin 53149.

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BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT" Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SP, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

# Classified Continued

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**\$LOANS\$ ON SIGNATURE TO—\$100,000!** Any purpose. Details Free. **ELITE**, Box 206-DG, East Rockaway, New York 11518.

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**"HIGH QUALITY MAILING LISTS!"** OPPORTUNITY SEEKERS! MULTI-LEVEL SPECIALIST! GUARANTEED DELIVERABILITY! FREE INFORMATION: MJG-DPML, AMBLER, PA 19002 (215) 643-1328.

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**\$60.00** per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

**"HUNDREDS\$ WEEKLY!"** GUARANTEED PROCESSING \$TAMPED ENVELOPES! \$TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

**FREE** dealership!! Receive \$25.00 orders keep \$15.00! Hottest pulling circular around! For complete **FREE** dealership send long stamped self-addressed envelope: Worldwide #18, Box 15940, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

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**BEING** a Bailbondsman is interesting and Profitable! My Booklet shows you How. Don't miss this opportunity. Rush \$10.00 to: Ray Lovell, IOAH-1, 4301 East Main, Farmington, New Mexico 87401.

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# Classified Continued

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**LEARN HOW TO BECOME AN X-RATED STAR!** Overweight, glasses OK. Darlene Dawn, 1-312-274-9600, Box 345-IO, Kenilworth, IL 60043

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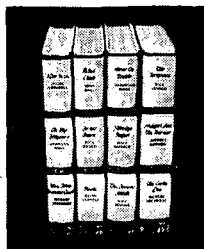
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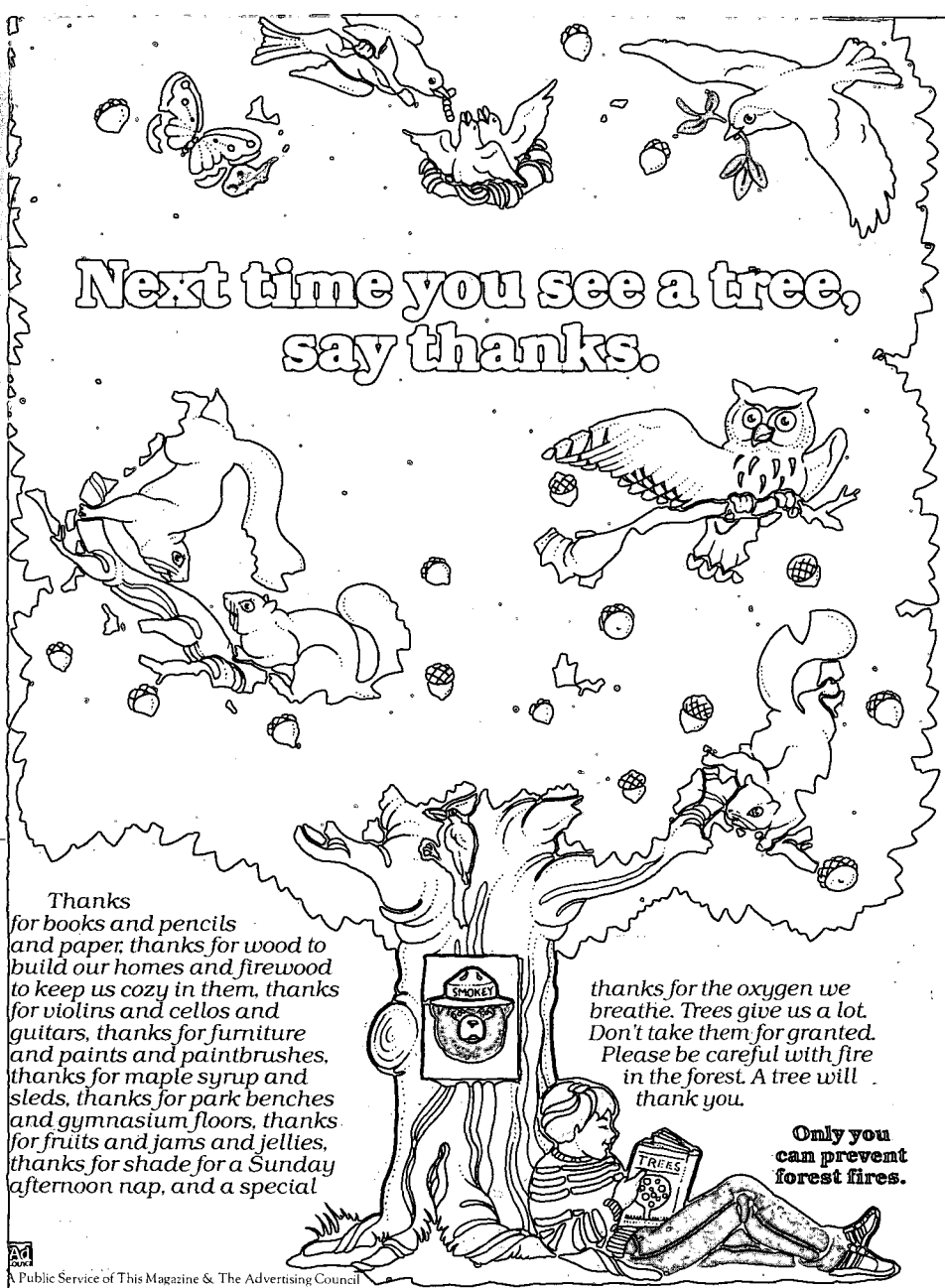
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say thanks.**

Thanks  
for books and pencils  
and paper, thanks for wood to  
build our homes and firewood  
to keep us cozy in them, thanks  
for violins and cellos and  
guitars, thanks for furniture  
and paints and paintbrushes,  
thanks for maple syrup and  
sleds, thanks for park benches  
and gymnasium floors, thanks  
for fruits and jams and jellies,  
thanks for shade for a Sunday  
afternoon nap, and a special

thanks for the oxygen we  
breathe. Trees give us a lot.  
Don't take them for granted.  
Please be careful with fire  
in the forest. A tree will  
thank you.

**Only you  
can prevent  
forest fires.**



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